Marion Zimmer Bradley's
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December 2000
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by Laura J. Underwood
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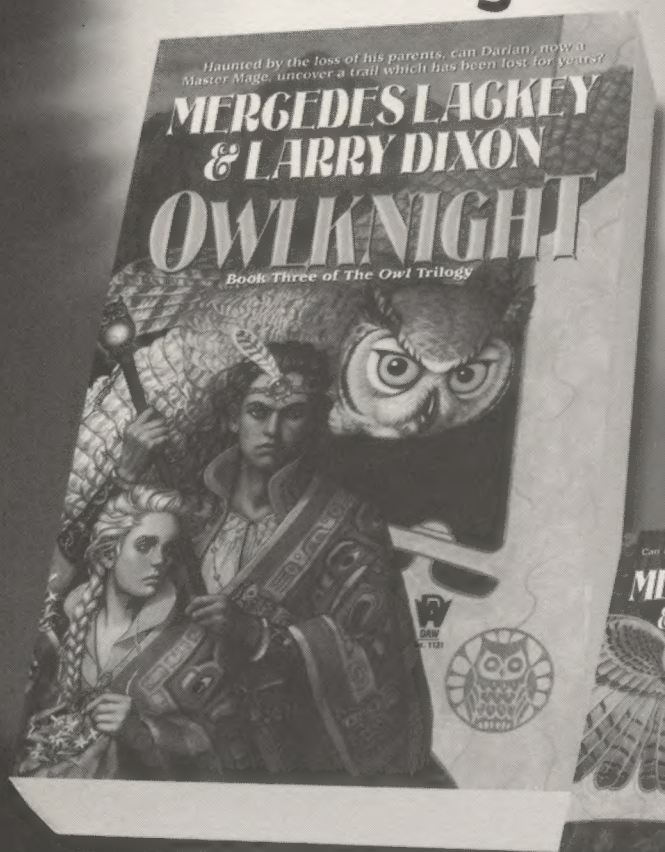
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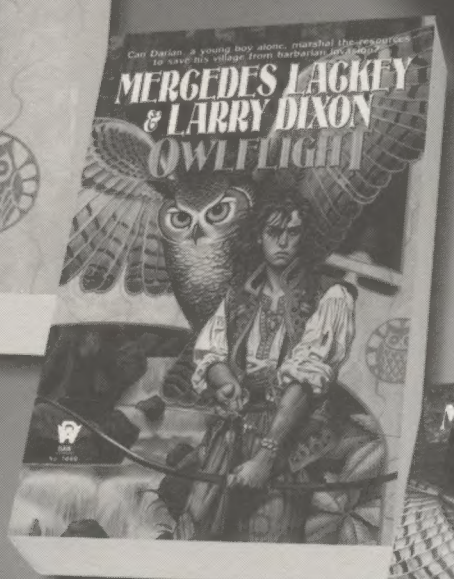

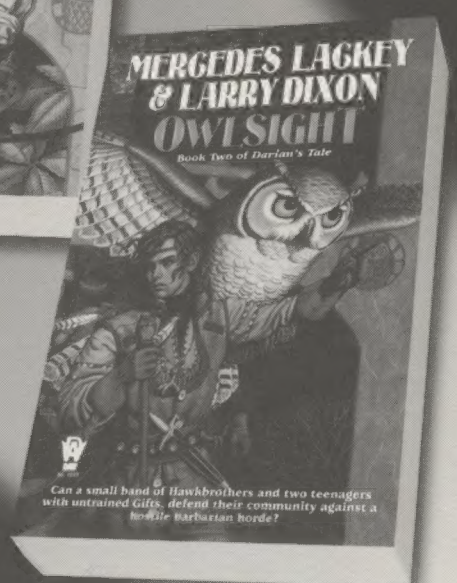
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Marion Zimmer Bradley's
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Pay It Forward

here's a current movie with this title (one I haven't seen), but I learned the phrase long ago — from Marion Zimmer Bradley and her secretary, Elisabeth Waters. Marion told me she'd realized, when her financial position became comfortable, that she couldn't repay many of the people who had helped her; some didn't need help, and others had passed on. So her only real course was to "pay it forward": to help others starting out, or temporarily in need. So she became a generous contributor to things like the Merola Opera Foundation, which trains young singers, and founded this magazine, to provide a market that was willing to consider submissions by people with no previous professional fiction sales (and to fill a huge hole in the availability of fantasy literature).

There are a lot of ways that anyone in fandom can "pay it forward". Every convention needs people to help organize and run it. If you meet the qualifications, donate blood at one of the Heinlein Blood Drives. Contribute to the SFWA Emergency Medical Fund, or one of the funds that provides scholarships to the writing workshops at Clarion and Clarion West. Volunteer to help out with children's programming — your task could be as simple, and delightful, as combing your local library for a good children's sf title (I checked out a copy of **JOURNEY TO THE MUSHROOM PLANET** a while back) and reading out loud from it for a half hour or so during the convention. Or use your duct tape skills to help kids build a spaceship out of cardboard and tinfoil. Start a local club for readers of sf and fantasy literature. Help put address stickers on their monthly postcards; fold the chairs after the meeting. Donate your used books to a prison reading program. Find a literacy program — try the library — and volunteer.

Marion hired me because I had a background in publishing and knew the science fiction/fantasy field fairly well; later we realized that we both shared a passion for encouraging new writers to stay the course and learn to write publishable fiction.

I went from thinking "this could be a pretty interesting job" to feeling honored to know and work with Marion. One way or another, I will stay active in the sf/f publishing field, so I can continue to indulge my passion and, at the same time, honor Marion's suggestion to "pay it forward".

Rachel Holmen

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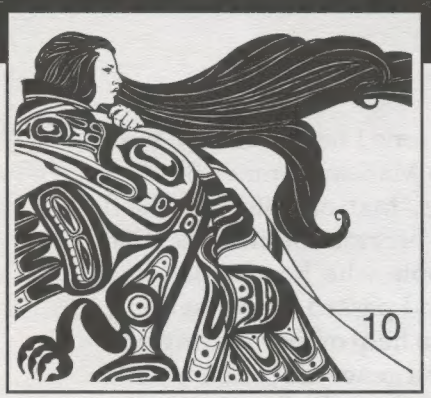

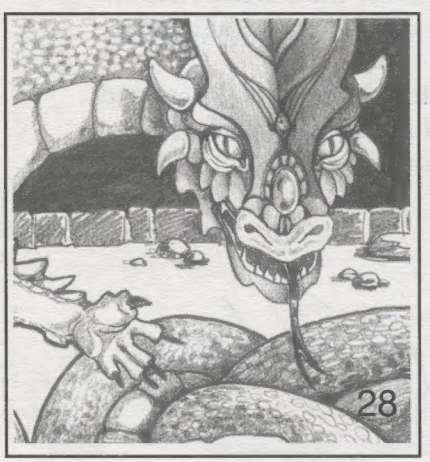

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Artwork by James Balkovek

Doonie's Gift

by Laura J. Underwood

She was sitting on a tumbled cromlech by the crossroads when Anwyn Baldomyre ambled down the stony road that early morning. Having just left the inn in the village of Boleybeg behind, he was not surprised to see her. There were still a number of dairy farms visible to his back, and he could only assume she was from one of those.

"Good morning, Grandmother," he said politely as he approached.

She hopped off the stone, agile as a cat, and planted herself in his path, forcing him to stop and take stock of her. She was a rangy little creature dressed in grey wool plaids and dingy linens that had seen better days. In height, she barely came up to his chin, though Anwyn did not count himself as tall. Her hair was black and shot through with gouts of steel. Bundled into a cobweb-like mass around her wrinkled face, some of its tendrils escaped to flutter with her every move. *She's as fey as the wind,* Anwyn thought. Wall-eyed, she shuffled up to him and thrust out one hand.

"Spare a copper pat or a crust of bread for an old woman?" she said.

Anwyn smiled for her. "I can do better than that," he said and reached into his satchel, scrounging under his spare shirt for the few coins he carried in his travels. He drew forth a brass tupin and slipped it into her hand. She took one look at it, snorted and thrust it back at him.

"Ne'er give me more than I ask, boy," she said.

Anwyn drew back with a frown. "But I have nothing smaller than tupins," he said. "Unless you want a silver pence."

She wrinkled her nose. "Ah, well, then. I'll keep it," she said, and the tupin disappeared into the depths of her clothes. "How about the crust of bread?"

What is this creature's game? he thought. "All I have is a wedge of cheese," he said.

Again, she looked disgruntled, but she nodded all the same. "All right then, let's have a bit of it."

Blinking, Anwyn reached into the satchel and drew forth a wedge large enough for two to share. He hardly had it out before eager hands snatched it from his grasp, broke off a small piece and promptly pushed it under her shawl. The rest of the wedge she dropped to the ground, then turned with a cackle, loping towards the woods beyond the crossroads.

Indignation and uncertainty warmed Anwyn's face as he stooped to collect the remains of the cheese and dust it off. "Well, I never ... of all the rude things to do ..."

"You were expecting politeness from one of her kind?" came Glynnanis' musical chime in Anwyn's head. He glanced across his shoulder at the unicorn head of the white harp peering out of the cerecloth sack.

"What do you mean, her kind?" he insisted.

"You'd know if you had made your sacrifice to be a true mage," the harp retorted cheerfully.

"Oh, don't start that," Anwyn said. He hated the way the harp was always reminding Anwyn of his potential to be a mage. The curse of his silver eyes. Anwyn knew a few cantrips, and he had learned the Songs of Power from the great mage, Rhystar of Far Reach, but Anwyn did not want to make the sacrifice that would release his full power. He had seen how magic had made Rhystar a prisoner, and wanted no part of such captivity. "Just tell me what you mean. What is her kind?"

"She was faery," Glynnanis said. *"You offended her by offering her more than she asked for."*

"Wonderful," Anwyn muttered. He did remember his father once saying that to offend seelie folk was unwise. In Anwyn's travels through Lamboria, he had met a number of fantastical beings, and seen many other strange things. For a place where folks didn't care much for magic, there always seemed to be an abundance of it around.

"You're lucky," Glynnanis insisted. *"Some faery folk will curse a man for giving them more than they want. It's some silly code of honor they have."*

Ridiculous was more what Anwyn thought, but he didn't want to argue the point. He had the road and a ways to go to the next village. With a sigh, he chose the right-hand path towards the woods and followed it, putting the strange old woman from his mind.

The clatter of hooves on the stony path somewhere up ahead first told Anwyn he was not alone. The woods had grown thick and eldritch about him, and the road itself was little more than a narrow winding trail that was working its way up and down over rocky rises. *Bandits,* he wondered. Lonely stretches like this could easily be their haunts, and he had encountered enough of them in his travels to know they were never up to any good.

Glynnanis, do you sense anyone? he thought, knowing the harp was sometimes more aware of such things than he.

"I can't really tell," the harp replied. *"This whole wood has a preternatural feel to it."*

On that, Anwyn was willing to agree. There was an air to the shadows that filled these ancient woods. Trees twisted and bowed in a variety of grotesque shapes, looking like faces and figures of old men. Thick moss blanketed much of the ground, except for the stone-littered sections of the road. He stopped and knelt, touching the ground to see if there were hoofprints visible, but the terrain was too rocky for his own eyes to make that distinction. His father would have known, but Thynwold Baldomyre was far away in Anywn's birthplace of Nymbaria Hold, keeping the High Lord's game forests. Not out in the wilds of Lamboria, wandering with his youngest and gentlest son.

Anwyn stood once more, when the sound of hooves clattered again from just over the next rise. Anwyn froze, fully expecting a covey of riders to charge down on him. He closed his eyes, seeking the notes of the Gate Song within himself, ready to flee back to the crossroads if he had to and take another route. Then opening his eyes, he stepped back and made ready to call his magical song.

But instead of a horse and rider, what he found standing on the height of the rise was a pony, a shaggy little beast of silver and black that shook its unkempt mane and stamped its flinty hooves on the stony trail. A nervous laugh escaped Anwyn as he stared at the newcomer. A little mare, by the look of her. She rolled her eyes and tossed her head.

"What are you doing out in the middle of nowhere," he said, shaking his head.

"I wouldn't trust it if I were you," Glynnanis said. *"It's got a wild look to its eyes."*

Anwyn shrugged. "It's only a small pony," he insisted, and started forward again, intending to move past the beast and continue on his road.

The pony seemed to have other ideas. As Anwyn approached, she reared and stamped the ground with more agitation than before.

"Oh, go on, shoo," Anwyn said, waving arms in hopes of frightening the creature out of his way.

He might as well have tried to frighten the road. The pony lashed at him with tiny sharp hooves, and bared yellowed teeth. Anwyn narrowly avoided the attack and was forced to move back down the road a short ways. As he did, the pony followed, planting herself in his path and firmly holding her ground.

"All right," Anwyn said. "I'll use the woods."

And he started to do just that, but the pony charged into the trees, bolting into his path and forcing him back on the road, and when he tried to go that way again, the little mare returned to snap those teeth too close to his arm for comfort. Anwyn stumbled back and glared at the beast.

"Lords and Ladies, Glynnanis, are you sure this thing isn't fey?" Anwyn said.

"It might be," the harp said. *"Too hard to tell with all the old magic filling this place."*

"Can you talk to it?"

"Me?" Glynnanis' musical voice took on a sharp, distracting edge. *"I didn't lower myself to speaking with horses when I was a living unicorn, and I am certainly not starting now!"*

Anwyn rolled his eyes. "Then I shall have to take matter into my own hands," he said and, closing his eyes, he began to hum the Gate Song, concentrating on top of the last rise behind the pony. Blackness swallowed him when he sang the spell song, and for a moment, he had no sense of time or place. Then his feet thumped against the ground, and he opened his eyes, staggering for balance. He had made it.

He was well uphill of the pony now. With a startled squeal, it wheeled, and Anwyn wasted no time. He shifted to the Song of Stone, feeling the hardness growing inside him and willing it into the ground as the notes of the song escaped his throat. The pony charged up the hill just as Anwyn willed the magic to build a wall. The ground before him lurched and shivered, and the very rocks tumbled into a high pile that forced the pony to slide to a halt on the far side. It thrust its nose over the wall as Anwyn ceased his song.

"Well now, who's the victor here?" the young harper teased, and turning, he bolted over the crest of the hill, leaving the frantically whickering pony behind.

* * *

"There must be a song in this somewhere," Glynnanis said.

"In what?" Anwyn asked and glanced over his shoulder. He slowed his pace now, having put some distance between himself and the strange pony.

"In defeating the fearsome guardian of the ancient forest," Glynnanis said.

"It was only a pony!" Anwyn said with a chortle.

"So, use your imagination. You've stretched the truth with your songs before. Who is even going to know?"

"I will," Anwyn said. "And besides, all I did was put up a wall."

"In the middle of the road, at that," Glynnanis teased. *"I would love to see the look on the face of the next farmer who drives his cart this way."*

Anwyn frowned. He had not thought about that when he raised the wall. Perhaps he might better use the Gate Song to return to the wall tomorrow and break it down ... but then, he would have to walk back this way on foot again, for he could only use each Song of Power once a day, and only if he rested. Rhystar was always saying it wasn't wise to fool around with nature ... or to leave evidence of one's power behind for others to find, unless you were not afraid to face the challenge of another mage ...

Then again, as he looked at the road beneath his feet, Anwyn realized there was little evidence of any wagons going this way for a long time. The path was too irregular. And the road itself was now winding between the braes and the wood, following the natural meander of the terrain. The land rose higher around him, casting shadows under the thick trees.

He heard the snort of a horse and the jingle of tack, and quickly turned, expecting to find the pony had managed to get around his wall and was hot on his heels. But the pony hadn't been wearing tack! Too late did the meaning of that thought sink in.

"Anwyn, have care!" Glynnanis cried, but even the harp's warning came too late. A rider was coming up the road, a man in worn leathers, with a mean eye. He grinned at the sight of the harper and reached up to rub the stubble of his chin with one hand as he reined his horse to a halt.

"Well, lads, what have we here?" he said.

And before Anwyn could open his mouth to reply, the brass pommel of a dagger clouted him in the back of the head. He dropped to his knees, trying desperately to save the harp on his back.

"Careful, lads, we don't want to damage that fine instrument. It's likely worth its weight in gold stanes."

"Anwyn!" Glynnanis sang in the thunder that ground through his head. But there was little Anwyn could do under the distressing pain. He sought to rise, only to be clouted again. And this time he went to the ground where blackness swallowed his thoughts and the harp's frantic cries.

Artwork by James Balkovek

The dense odors of musty cloth, old straw and dry earth filled Anwyn's nostrils as he took a deep breath. By the Four, his head pounded with anvil strokes, and as he tried to move, every muscle in his neck protested viciously. He was shivering too, though he sensed there was a fire. Then it occurred to him that some of his clothing was missing: his boots, his embroidered tunic, and his cloak, to be precise.

"Easy now, lad," an old woman's voice chided, and something to its tenor was vaguely familiar. Anwyn opened his eyes and tried once more to rise. He only got as far as his elbows before nausea drove him to abandon the attempt and hide his face in what felt like a pillow of old rags.

"Hardheaded, you are," she said. "Youth has no patience."

"Where am I?" he asked, opening his eyes. As near as he could tell, he was face-down on some sort of pallet. He couldn't see much more than a floor, the bedding, and a bundle of rags.

"My home, laddie," she said. Some of the rags near him began to stir. A wild-eyed face leaned down to peer at him.

"You?" he said, and groaned.

"Aye, lad."

"But ... what happened?"

"Bandits are bad this time of the year.

They took a shine to all you had when they followed ye from Boleybeg, and now it is theirs ..."

"Glynnanis!" Anwyn cried and pushed up, fighting to ignore the wretched pain. "My harp!"

"Hush, now," the old woman said and forced him down. A cold compress was placed against the base of his skull, and he hissed. "You've got a nasty gash there."

"You don't understand ... I have to get my harp back ..."

"You're in no condition to get anything now, lad," she said.

"Who are you?" he said, and once more fought the nausea to push himself upright. And this time he made it, feeling the cold trickle of her compress running down his back. She cocked her head and grinned.

"My true name is not for mortal tongues, nor is it yours to know," she said calmly. "But you can call me Doonie."

"Doonie?" Anwyn said, slowly mulling the word. He had heard it before in his life, but with the pounding of his head, he couldn't say where, except that it might have been some faery tale his father shared ...

"Aye ... and you should have listened to my warning."

"What? What warning?"

"Back on the road," she said. "I tried to tell ye not to go that way. I knew the mean wretches were up among the braes and the barrows waiting for you, for I saw them trail ye from the village. But ye had to be grand and show off your musical magic, young mage."

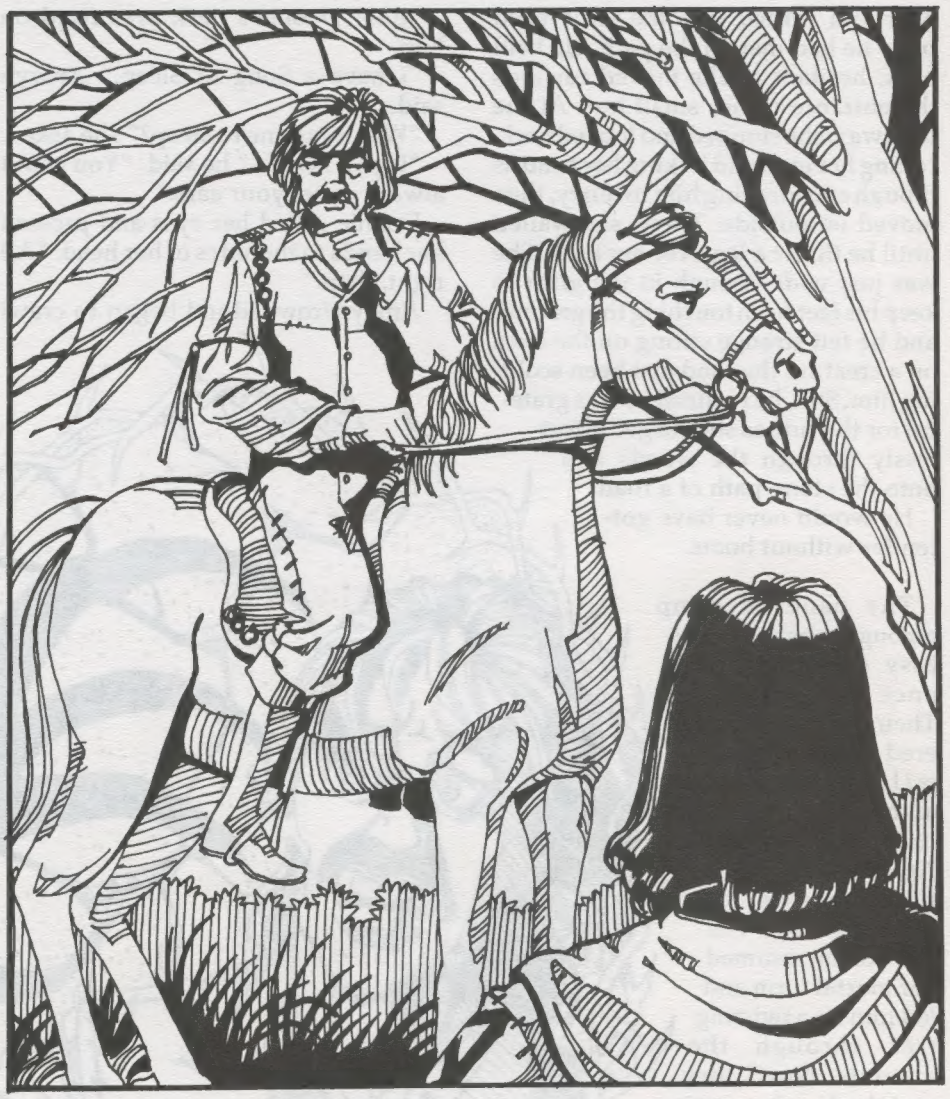
He started to protest that a pony had tried to stop him instead of her, but she rattled on, heedless of his frown.

"Now look at you. Your head is broke and you've naught but the clothes on your back."

"I can't stay here," Anwyn said. "I must fetch Glynnanis back before those men sell my harp."

"And how do you think you're going to get up and about with that lump and gash on your head?"

He sighed. There was a way ... at least to better his chances of getting out of here for now. But as to finding the harp, he had no idea. *Heal myself first, then worry about Glynnanis,* he thought and closed his eyes. Softly, he hummed the notes of the Song of Healing in his throat and let them swell to fill the shadowy place he found himself. He heard Doonie gasp in wonder as colors



enveloped him, brightening around the back of his head. He sang until the pain ceased to badger him, and only then did he let the Song stop.

"Impressive," she said. "I imagine you sing well for your supper."

Anwyn managed a little smile. "Look, I don't mean to sound ungrateful, but I must find my harp. Do you know where the bandits went?"

"I might," Doonie said.

"Where?"

"Now why should I let you go off and get yourself killed after I've done you the favor of saving your life?" she said.

"Please, you don't understand. Glynnanis is a very special harp, for it contains ..."

"The soul of the last living unicorn, uppity beast," she said, wagging her head. "Still, I can see that its loss distresses you, so I suppose I have no choice but to help you. I owe you one more favor anyway."

"One more ...?" Anwyn said. "For what?"

"What you give to my kind, lad, you get back threefold. That's faery law. You gave me a tupin, so I saved your life. You shared your cheese with me, so I will get you back your harp. But expect nothing beyond that, you hear?"

"Yes," Anwyn said, wearing a puzzled frown. What a strange creature, indeed.

"Now come on," she said. "Let's see if you can stand and waste no more time. They've half a day on us, but I know the place where they like to camp."

"Where?" Anwyn asked and gingerly crawled to his feet, uncertain if the healing spell would stop him from being dizzy again, but he made it.

"In the barrow field beyond Boley Wood," she said. "Come now. I'll give you a ride ..."

"What?"

Before his eyes the old woman bent

Artwork by James Balkovek

over and turned into the surly-eyed pony he had met on the path. He held back, hesitant as she moved towards the entrance of her small hut. At the doorway, she stopped and looked back, rolling her eyes and jerking her head as though encouraging him to hurry, then moved on outside. There, she waited until he threw a leg over her back. She was just wide enough in the girth to keep his feet from touching the ground, and he felt strange sitting on the back on a creature that had just been scolding him. Still, he realized he was grateful for the ride as she surged effortlessly through the woods and onto the stony path of a road.

He would never have gotten far without boots.

The bandit's camp among the barrows was easy enough to find once darkness fell. Their campfire flickered like an amber will-o-the-wisp among the multitude of graves. Anwyn crouched in the shadows at Doonie's side. The old woman resumed her mortal form and led him on a twisting trek through the mounds. Now, they watched six men around a fire, toasting their day's success with ale. One of them had Glynnanis haphazardly propped in his lap, and Anwyn cringed at the rude sounds being wrestled from the harp's golden strings. *Lords and Ladies, don't let him drop Glynnanis, or Rhystar will never forgive me!*

"This won't be easy for you," Doonie said. "Ye might best wait until they fall asleep."

Anwyn was willing to agree with that. He had already used his Gate Song once today, and could hardly count being unconscious from a blow the same as restful sleep. Nor could he use Stone to build a wall and trap these men, or risk fire, rain, or any other destructive spell that would place Glynnanis in danger.

Sleep, however ...

"I could do something about that," he said softly.

"Eh?" Doonie's dark eyes fixed on him.

"I have a Song of Sleep," Anwyn said.

"Will it put me to sleep?" she asked.

"If you hear it," he said. "You could always cover your ears."

Doonie rolled her eyes and pressed her hands to the sides of her head. "All right, then."

Anwyn frowned and began to crawl forward, softly humming the notes of the Song of Sleep in his throat. The bandits were making more than enough noise to cover the sound. He crept as close as he dared in the shadows and opened his mouth to sing.

At first, the bandits looked startled to hear such an eerie sound coming from the mounds. But within moments, the sweet song had them charmed so they slumped to the ground. Anwyn waited until their snores echoed before stopping his Song and slipping into camp.

"Thank the Four!" Glynnanis said as Anwyn carefully pulled the harp from the bandit's limp clutches. *"I thought this ham-handed lout would drop me for certain! Did you know they were plotting to sell me?"*

"Thank me later," Anwyn said drolly and began to search for his other possessions. Fortunately, the bandits had not divided his goods among themselves. In no time, he was shucking into his boots and dragging his tunic over his head. Then wrapping his cloak about him, he seized up harp and satchel, and made his way back to where he left Doonie.

The old woman wasn't there in any form. Anwyn sighed. Well, she had said that she would lead him here and no more. *I'll just have to find the way back on my own...*

He heard the loud snap of a log tumbling, and the crackle of sparks were overshadowed by a startled curse from the bandit's camp.

"Lords and Ladies!" he hissed as a rabble of shouts broke the night.

"The harp's gone!"

"The harper's gear!"

"I knew we should have cut his throat!"

Anwyn bolted. It wouldn't take them long to find him if he stayed, but in the dark, the mounds were now a confusing maze. Anwyn could not say for certain which path to take. He felt like he was charging in circles. How many barrows were there? He coursed among them like a frightened hare, listening to the voices at his back. An order to spread out was shouted. Anwyn stumbled over a dark clump of grass and cursed, especially when the gleam of a torch rose above the mounds.

"He's over here somewhere! I hear him!"

By the Four! They were coming from all directions now. There was naught to do but break for the shadows. They probably knew these paths a sight better than he and would soon have him surrounded if he didn't find a way out. And with no Gate Song to help him escape ...

Artwork by James Balkovek

"In here!" a voice hissed from the dark.

Anwyn froze, especially when a bony hand reached out and snagged his cloak. He would have shouted in fright, but a familiar face popped into view, grinning like an imp. Doonie!

"Well, don't stand on ceremony, lad, come on in!" she said and tugged.

Anwyn needed no more encouragement. He dove into the low hole, swallowed by the shadows, and barely in time. Feet thundered past the opening as he huddled against a stone and earthwork wall, clutching Glynnanis to his chest.

"*A fine mess this is turning out to be,*" the harp groused.

Anwyn said nothing. Little light poured into this place. He could feel Doonie's wispy little presence at his side as she leaned over his shoulder to whisper in his ear, "Come with me."

He nodded. The fingers that still clutched the hem of his cloak pulled Anwyn farther into the mound. He had to crouch for a ways before he could stand again. Then his eyes began to adjust, and he realized there was a faint glow of foxfire to the walls, barely revealing the grave. It was large and empty, except for the coffin-sized stone at one end marked all around with whorls. Doonie let go of him, and made her way there to sit down. She patted the stone beside her, and Anwyn reluctantly took the proffered place.

"What now?" he asked softly, squinting at her face.

"We wait," Doonie said. "They'll get tired of searching for you sooner or later."

Anwyn sighed. Later seemed more likely. Now and again, he heard someone running by and, at one point, footsteps thundered overhead. Doonie looked totally unconcerned.

"I thought you were done with me once you led me here," he said.

"And so I was," she said. "But you had to go and stir them bandits up like a nest of hornets ..."

"It was a log that woke them, not me," he protested.

"Neither here nor there," she said with a shrug. "I had no choice but to bolt in here, and with you leading them in circles, I figured you'd lead them right to me if I didn't do something."

Anwyn sighed. "I'm sorry," he said. "I wasn't sure about the path ..."

He froze when torchlight flooded the tunnel and reached into the barrow.

"Hey, Colin, I found an opening!" a voice shouted out in the dark.

Lords and Ladies! Anwyn thought.

Doonie merely sighed. "Looks like I'll have to handle this matter myself," she said. "Get back behind the stone, and whatever you do, don't look."

Anwyn crawled into the musty space, crouching. *Don't look?* he thought. *Why?*

From the corner of his eyes, he saw Doonie's shadow as she stood up on the stone. The flicker of torchlight filled the barrow, followed by the bandits.

"Well, well, old mother," one of them said. "Where's the pretty harper?"

"I ate him," she said briskly. "And he was but a sweet morsel to whet me appetite. Now I shall have a fine feast."

Chuckles filled the air.

"Come on, grandmother. Tell us where he is, and we might leave you be ..."

A banshee's mournful wail filled the barrow. Anwyn flinched, covering his ears as the sound tore at them. He glanced up, the old woman's warning forgotten, and froze.

What rose from the height of the stone was neither old crone nor surly pony. It was ragged and cadaverous and had a hideous parody of an equine face with rows of sharp fangs and flaming eyes. Arms high, it leaped off the stone and dove at the men who were clawing one another aside to get through the barrow hole. They scrambled chaotically until the last of them managed to disappear through the opening and the echo of their frightened shouts faded.

Doonie turned around, and her hideous countenance widened with a malicious grin that stood Anwyn's hair on end. Slowly, the monstrous creature advanced, and even Glynnanis' warning could not move the harper to flee from the terrifying sight. Doonie reared over him, the rows of sharp teeth gnashing, and stretched forth one claw.

"I told ye not to look," she wailed in her otherworldly voice. "Got two brass tupins, lad?"

Anwyn blinked, then madly rooted through his satchel until he came up with a handful of coins. Trembling, he offered them.

"Oh, don't you ever learn?" she scolded. "Ne'er give me more than I ask for, lad!"

Still shaking, he sorted two brass tupins and dropped them into her hand. The talons closed over the coins, and fast as a wink, they disappeared into the ragged folds. The apparition misted and became the old crone. Anwyn sank back against the barrow wall, wondering if his heart would ever slow down again.

"Foolish boy," she said. "Let's go before them bandits get their tripes out of a knot and come looking for you again."

"Why do you need two brass tupins?" he asked.

Dark eyes flashed full of mischief. "One's the price of saving your life," she said and grinned.

"And the other?"

"Passage back to the road. And this time, mind ye stay on it and pay close attention when one of us chooses to show ye the kindness of warning ye against danger. Even yer uppity harp knows better than that."

She turned and started for the opening. Anwyn's knees were water, but he managed to follow her out into the night.

Faeries and their honor, he thought with a shudder.

The next time, he would listen.

❄

Photo by Rachel E. Holmen

Laura J. Underwood has sold nearly forty short stories of fantastic fiction. Her work has been featured in numerous publications including *MZB's FANTASY Magazine*, *Pulp Eternity*, and *Adventures of Sword & Sorcery*, as well as several anthologies (**SWORD AND SORCERESS**, **CATFANTASTIC**, and **SUCH A PRETTY FACE**). In her more mundane life, she's a librarian, a hiker, and a fair harpist. She has a deep love of Scottish folklore and archeology, and tends to mutter in a strange accent as she writes many of her tales, which greatly confuses the family cat.

James Balkovek lives in California's Sierra foothills. He has over twenty years of commercial and editorial illustration and design experience.

Hasa Kesla
(Good-Bye)

by Jim C. Hines

Jan Christopher hurried into room 212, double-checking the hastily scrawled name at the top of the chart. *It has to be a coincidence,* she thought. A deeper part of her mind responded, *Not likely.* "Bukwas" wasn't a common Kwakiutl name. In fact, even with all the reservation patients who passed through Vancouver General, she had only encountered it once before.

Her hopes died as she recognized the slender Indian woman who glanced up at her with a lazy smile.

"Doctor Christopher. I'm so glad you could make it."

Jan slapped the clipboard onto the table by the bed. The other patient in the room, an eighty-year-old man with Alzheimer's, stirred and mumbled, "Eh? Wassat?"

Forcing her voice to remain calm, Jan grabbed the rail of the bed with both hands. "What are you doing here, Celeste?"

"I thought it was your job to tell me, doctor," she replied mildly.

You are not going to march in here and mess up this part of my life too, Jan thought furiously. "You've got one minute to get out of here. After that I'm calling Security."

"What will you tell them? 'Take her away before she drains your blood'? Really, Jan. After everything you've lost, you should be more careful — that sort of craziness is likely to cost you your job."

Hippocratic Oath be damned. At that moment, Jan wanted nothing more than to wrap her hands around Celeste's throat, squeezing until the last trace of pseudo-life drained out of those obsidian eyes. But the rational part of her mind knew what the results would be.

Apparently sensing the fury racing through Jan's veins, Celeste held up a hand in a sign of truce. "Believe me, the list of places I'd rather be right now is endless. But I don't even know how I got here."

"What?"

"I have a vague impression of walking by the Bay last night." She shrugged. "The next thing I remember is waking up in this bed, wearing nothing but this cheap gown." She glared at the thin cotton wrap in disgust.

For the first time, Jan really looked at her patient. Her skin was pale, even more so than usual. The last time she had seen Celeste, the vampire's complexion had still been dark enough to reveal her native heritage. Now, she was whiter than Jan. Her face was gaunt, and the sharp cheekbones contrasted sharply with sunken hazel eyes.

Celeste raised her left arm. "Now do you believe me?"

Very slowly, Jan nodded. An I.V. tube trailed from Celeste's arm like a thin snake, its fangs buried in her skin.

"They drew my blood twice and gave me a shot of something." She stopped to consider that. "It was a ... disturbing experience."

Biting her lip, Jan picked up Celeste's chart and took a closer look at the various numbers and abbreviations that covered the pages. Blood pressure and pulse were both high, but that was probably normal, considering the added roles that blood played in her system. White blood cell count was down, but again, the immune system was rather redundant in Celeste's case.

She flipped to the next page, and a swirl of color jumped out at her. One of

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the lab techs had circled a number with blue highlighter, scrawling beside it the words *Is this a joke?*

It felt like one. A great big cosmic joke. And Jan took great pleasure when she realized that she would be the one to deliver the punch line.

"According to this, Ms. Bukwas, when you were admitted, your blood sugar was two thousand thirty-eight."

She waited for her patient to react. All of the sudden, *she* had the upper hand, and she was determined to enjoy it.

"Go ahead," Celeste said, obviously annoyed. "What does that mean?"

"A reading that high suggests that you've come down with diabetes. They ran a glycosylated hemoglobin test to confirm it."

"This is a joke."

"You're not spilling ketones," Jan continued, flinging medical terminology like spears. "That's probably because of your body's unique characteristics. But you're not getting any energy from the glucose you ingest. You can't break it down, so it builds up in your bloodstream and you grow more and more fatigued."

Celeste sat up in the bed, and her eyes flashed with anger. "Perhaps you're forgetting that I'm immune to disease?"

"Bacterial and viral infections, maybe," Jan snapped. "But diabetes is neither. Nobody knows how it works. You've been thirstier than usual, right?"

A reluctant nod.

"In fact, considering the way your system regulates itself, you've probably been pissing blood for a week, trying to flush the sugar out."

"Two weeks," she whispered.

Crossing her arms in satisfaction, Jan delivered the final piece of evidence like a prosecutor addressing the jury. "That shot they gave you was insulin. The next time they checked your blood sugar, it had dropped to eight hundred. Congratulations, Ms. Bukwas — you are, without a doubt, the world's first diabetic Kwakiutl vampire."

"Tsaksoenok, not Kwakiutl," she said. But her mind was obviously elsewhere. She kept looking at the I.V., studying the clear patch of tape that held the white catheter in place. A few purple bruises surrounded the spot where the needle entered the skin.

Normally, Jan would have called in a diabetes educator to explain the disease and help the patient cope with the shock. But not this time, not for this patient. She didn't deserve the gentle approach. "There's no cure," she said. "You'll need multiple injections every day for the rest of your life."

"I see." Her voice was calm, but something in her eyes brought Jan back to reality. *This isn't a game.* "And if I don't follow your suggestions?" Celeste asked.

"Then your blood sugar will slowly rise until you pass out again. And maybe this time you won't be lucky enough to have someone drag you in before sunrise."

For an instant, a look that Jan could only describe as relief flashed over Celeste's features. But when she spoke, her voice still brimmed with malice. "Thank you, doctor." She smiled, a tight, evil smile that made Jan take a step back. "Rick was right. You're very good at what you do."

Jan straightened, jerking her chin up

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and taking a tight breath. Without another word, she grabbed the clipboard and stormed out of the room.

An hour later, she had regained control. *Amazing what an hour of drudgework will do,* she thought as she walked out of the records room, rubbing her eyes. She almost collided with Will Leska, who was on his way out for the night.

"Sorry about that," the big nurse said, catching Jan by the elbow.

"I'm fine," she said.

"So why didn't you tell us we had a celebrity?"

Jan cocked her head in confusion.

"Celeste Bukwas. She's written three or four collections of stories and poetry. Her last one was **TRACKS OF THE RAVEN**."

"I didn't know," she said. Though now that she thought about it, she dimly recalled Rick mentioning something about Celeste being a writer.

"I've got a copy I'm going to bring in for her to sign. I'll drop it off in your locker. She's pretty good."

Desperate to change the subject, Jan reached out and gently touched Will's jacket. "This is nice," she said.

He grinned, holding his arms out and turning to give her a better view of the quillwork that covered the back of the denim jacket. "Thanks. My mother-in-law did it for me. I'd never have the patience to do it myself."

Jan studied the thousands of porcupine quills, all of which formed a large abstract black and white pattern. It was almost three-dimensional, and the image vaguely resembled a four-way yin-yang. "Very nice," she repeated.

Jan stopped to pick up the glucose testing kit on the way to 212. She still wasn't sure how to handle Celeste's presence here. On the one hand, she *was* sick, and she needed help. There was also a certain satisfaction that came from suddenly being the one in control. At the same time, Celeste was dangerous, and the sooner she left, the better. True, as far as Jan knew, the vampire had never killed anyone. But regardless, this was not the place for someone who preyed on others.

She found Celeste standing by the bed, buttoning her shirt. The I.V. tube hung limply from its stand, slowly dripping saline solution into a puddle on the floor. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm leaving. As a patient, I believe I have that right."

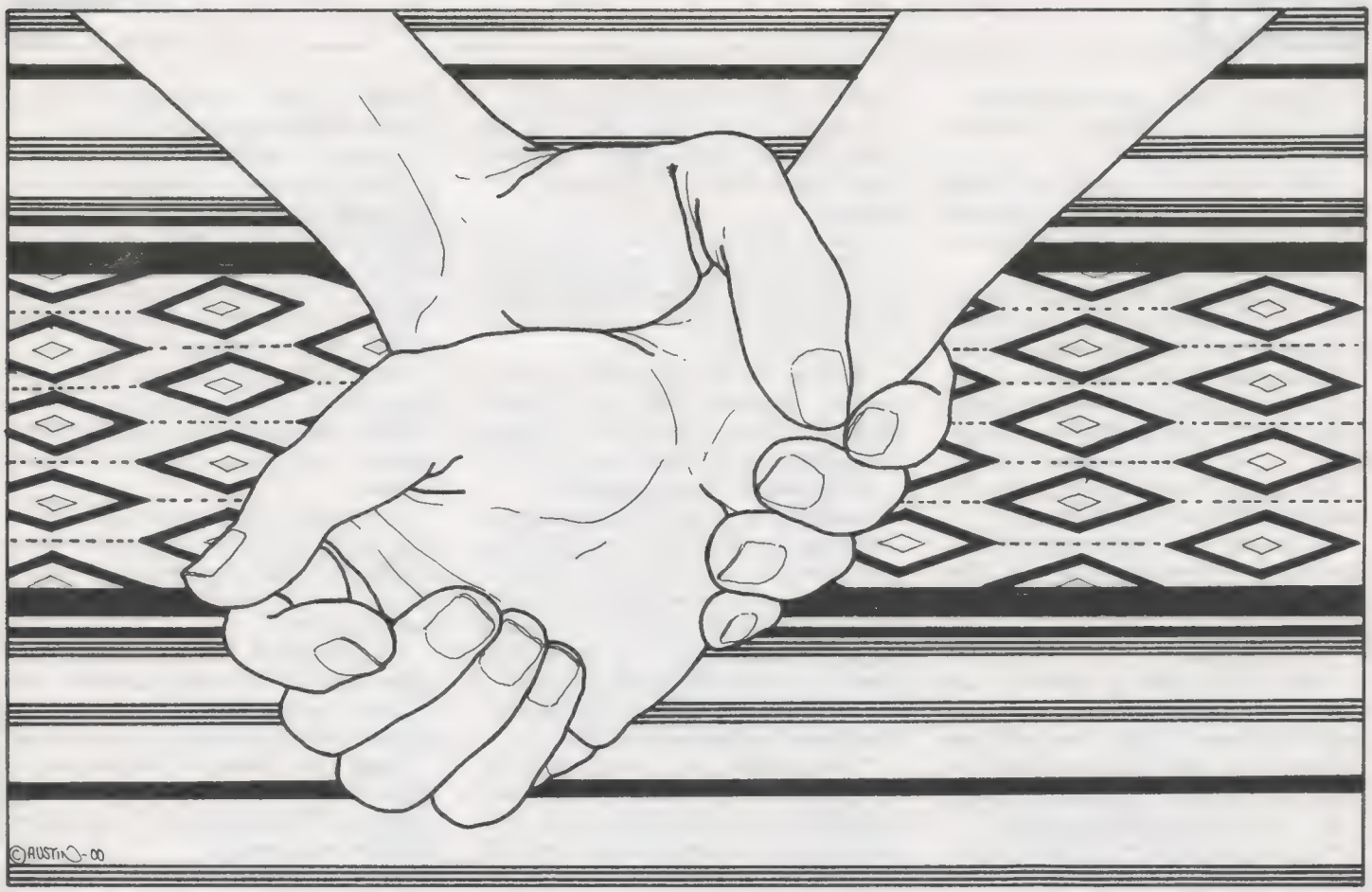
Jan glanced at her watch. Seven-thirty. The sun had set over an hour ago, so there was nothing to stop Celeste from leaving. "We haven't even started to figure out your treatment," she protested.

Why are you trying to stop her? a voice asked. Her pride shoved the question back down. Jan's patients did *not* simply get up and walk out before they were healthy. At least, not without her orders.

She placed both of her hands on the table, narrowly missing an untouched dinner tray, and leaned forward. "You're not leaving here until we get this under control."

Celeste grabbed Jan by the wrist, pulling her off balance. "Do you realize what you're saying? You don't want me here any more than I want to be here."

It was a vise clamping onto her arm. She knew that those fingers could close with enough force to shatter every bone in her wrist. So she bit off her first



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response, not wanting to provoke the vampire further. "You're also my patient," she said quietly. "So change back into your gown, get back into bed, and let me do my job."

Celeste released her arm and glared. Jan crossed her arms to keep her hands from shaking under the intensity of that gaze.

"You hate me, don't you?"

"It doesn't matter," Jan said.

Celeste looked away. "Doctors make good liars. Is it something they teach you in medical skill, or does it come from experience?"

"I'm a doctor. My personal life is irrelevant," she said evenly.

"Very well." Celeste pulled a necklace from her shirt and stared at the smooth, gray rock that hung suspended in a leather thong. She seemed almost to be meditating, sorting through options in her mind. The stone was irregularly shaped, almost like an animal, but time had worn it down too far to be recognizable. "I'll stay. But first, I am hungry."

For a moment, Jan was so caught up in her victory that she forgot what she was talking to. "The doctor who admitted you signed you up for an eighteen-hundred calorie diet," she said. Her voice trailed off as Celeste's eyes rose up to meet hers again.

"I am hungry," she repeated quietly. Ice stabbed into Jan's mind. Her vision narrowed until all she could see was Celeste's face. Her eyes, brown and intense like those of a rabid animal, expanded until all that was left was blackness.

She couldn't see, couldn't feel her body. She knew she was moving — her inner ear still worked well enough to tell her that — but she didn't know where.

She's going to kill me, she thought desperately. She felt like she was falling, completely out of control as she waited for the impact that would end her life.

Her vision cleared slowly. The darkness faded into blurred tunnel vision, and at the end of the tunnel, Celeste leaned against a pale wall. A few seconds later, she realized where they were.

"Put that down." She tried to make it sound forceful, but only a harsh croak emerged.

"Excuse me?" Celeste took another sip from the straw that pierced the half-empty packet of blood like one of those foil fruit drink packages.

"I said put it down."

"It's of no use to you. There are all sorts of germs and worse swimming around in there now. It would probably have some rather unpleasant side effects if you gave it to a patient." She smiled and returned the straw to her lips, all the while watching Jan's reaction.

Jan was terrified at the idea of matching that stare, but she had no choice. She couldn't just stand there and let Celeste run loose in the hospital's blood bank. Every contaminated pint could mean death for a patient.

"We're going back to your room *now*." She fully expected Celeste to put her back into the trance she had used before, but the vampire just grinned and shook her head.

Steeling herself, Jan reached out and tore the blood pack from Celeste's hand, ignoring the drops that splashed onto her hand and shirt. "We're going."

Celeste sighed. "I'm surprised at you. I would have thought that breaking

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into hospital supplies was more than enough to get me thrown out of here."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" Jan snapped. Then she paused. *She really would. She wants to let this kill her.* She dropped the half-empty bag into the medical waste container on the way out. "You're my patient, and my patients do not run out of here to die if there's another way."

Celeste just laughed. As they walked into room 212, she said, "But there isn't."

"We'll see." Jan waved an arm, gesturing for Celeste to return to her bed. Someone had already cleaned up the puddle under the I.V. *I'll have to come up with an excuse to cover that.*

"As I understand it, you need to check my blood sugar after I've eaten. Correct?"

Jan nodded.

"Try it. I think you'll see what I mean."

A few minutes later, Celeste's point had been made. Four lancets of varying types and sizes lay on the table. None had been able to penetrate the vampire's skin.

"I feel so much better after a meal," she said smugly. "And now, perhaps you will discharge me?"

Jan shook her head. Knowing in advance that it was futile, she grabbed a syringe and tried to force it into Celeste's shoulder. The needle bent into a horseshoe shape, and a few drops of insulin dripped uselessly onto the mattress.

"Damn," she whispered. Her mind raced, trying to come up with alternatives. Perhaps a stronger needle? Insulin syringes were some of the slimmest, flimsiest available. There had to be something stronger that would work.

Celeste cocked her head. "I know that you hate me for what I did to Rick. For taking him away from you. So why not just let me die?"

"Because I'm your doctor. And because I'm not going to let you take the coward's way out. You want to kill yourself, fine. But you'll have to do it yourself. You're not going to sit back and just let it happen. Not while you're in my care."

"Such passion ..." Celeste smiled. "Very well. Your efforts provide entertainment, if nothing else."

If anything was sharp enough to penetrate the vampire's skin, it was the glare Jan shot at her before she left.

* * *

"Hold still," Jan snapped.

"It won't work."

"We'll see." She swabbed Celeste's leg with an alcohol pad. It was probably unnecessary, but six years in the medical profession had left her with certain habits that couldn't be ignored.

"This will probably hurt," she said in a matter-of-fact voice. She took one last look at the sharpened toothpick in her hand, then pressed it into Celeste's thigh.

The skin dented, but refused to break. Jan pressed harder, and the tip snapped. "I thought you were supposed to be vulnerable to wood. What happened to all that stake-through-the-heart stuff?"

Celeste shrugged. "Some of us are. Others aren't. Were I your typical Transylvanian stereotype, these things might have been effective." She waved a hand to encompass the other things they had tried: the silver pin Jan had snatched from Lost and Found, the garlic solution she had rubbed the skin with, even a tiny gold crucifix earring, now missing the post.

"If there is nothing else, would you kindly stop wasting my time?"

More than anything, Jan wanted to erase the arrogance on that face. But she was out of ideas, and there really was no way to keep Celeste here against her will.

"Fine." She swept the contents of the table into a small bag for disposal. "A discharge nurse will be up here in the next hour or so."

"I'm sorry, but it's the way the world works," Celeste called, still taunting her. "We don't always get what we want."

Jan clenched her teeth so tightly that her jaw hurt by the time she got down to the main floor. She signed a form for the release of Celeste Bukwas, then headed down the hall toward the lounge. Her shift was almost over anyway.

She felt like she had been fighting with Celeste for days. And she was tired of it. Let her die. It was her own choice.

But it still nagged at her. In some twisted way, by allowing herself to die, Celeste was once again taking something from Jan. First she had stolen Jan's fiancé, and now she would steal her confidence, her image of herself as someone who had the power to save her patients. She flaunted the fact that there was nothing Jan could do. Just like she had flaunted it when she took

Rick away from her.

"He's mine now." Even two years later, Jan could still remember every carefully articulated syllable.

Her mind drifted back, remembering the promises, all of the plans she had made with him. The trips they were going to take. The children they were going to have. Even their wedding. They hadn't set the date, but they had talked about it, figuring out who they would invite and where they would hold the service. And then he met *her*.

Rick had been afraid. Afraid of life, and even more afraid of death. He was terrified of it. Jan had seen his phobia only once before, when his father died in the hospital after a two-month fight with cancer. Had it not been for Jan's constant urging and encouragement, Rick wouldn't even have visited his father in those last weeks.

So when he found Celeste, when he found a way to slip between Death's fingers and live forever, everything else was forgotten.

She walked into the back room and, finding nothing better to take out her aggression on, slammed her palm into her locker. Something inside landed with a thud, and Jan frowned. All that should have been there was her jacket.

She opened the door and picked up the book that had fallen. It was the book Will had promised to leave for her. Celeste's book. Her first impulse was to hurl it across the room, but she had too much respect for books to do that. And, much as she hated to admit it, a part of her was curious to know what sort of writing a vampire could produce.

After several minutes of stalling, she finally sat down and opened the book to a random page.

Ishi and Coyote

Well, way back when (though not *too* far back), there was a young Indian named Ishi. He was the last of his tribe, and folks came from all over the country to see him. They dressed him up in a bone breastplate and feathered headdress so the people would see what a *real* Indian looked like.

One day, Coyote heard about this fellow. He said to himself, "I should go and see what a real Indian looks like." He was a bit puzzled, because he had seen Indians all his life. But maybe he had only been seeing fakes. It was always best to be sure, after all.

When Coyote got to California, he was disappointed. "Why, this is just Ishi." From everything he had been told, he expected a huge monster of a man, with savage eyes that sparked with bloodlust, like a raging fire. But they had Ishi up there in a cage, sitting by a fake campfire, and the only thing in his eyes was loneliness.

Now if there's one thing Coyote hates, it's cages. So he ran up and started gnawing at the bars. All he managed to do was break a tooth, and then the white folk came up and dragged him off, kicking him and threatening to shoot him if he came back.

Coyote was mighty pissed, but there was nothing he could do. He hated being shot even more than he hated cages. So he left.

He hadn't gotten far when he ran into Porcupine. Porcupine took one look at Coyote and laughed. "You got a bootprint on your behind, Coyote."

Coyote told him what had happened.

"Well shoot, that ain't no problem. I'll get Ishi out for you." With that, Porcupine began walking. The first white man he saw, he ran right at him, slamming his tail against the man's leg and burying a dozen quills in him. The man hopped away, cursing, and Porcupine laughed.

"I'll have Ishi out in no time."

He got closer and closer, shoving the white men out of his way as he went, and Coyote followed behind, watching. This might work, he thought. Porcupine will get the white men out of the way, and then we'll bust Ishi free. (He still hadn't figured out how to get the lock open, of course.)

They got right up in front of the cage. "We've come to rescue you, Ishi," Coyote shouted.

Ishi looked around, and when he saw Coyote, he smiled. "It is good to see you, friend. But who is this 'we' you're talking about?"

Coyote looked around, confused. It took him a minute before he found Porcupine. The poor little beast was completely bare, for every time he stabbed a quill into someone, that quill came off, exposing pale pink flesh. He looked like a shaved rat.

Ishi shook his head sadly. "There are too many for you, friend. You should go."

Coyote looked around, for his ears had already picked up the pounding

Artwork by Alicia Austin

footsteps of more men approaching. He grabbed Porcupine in his mouth (which he could do safely, now) and sprinted away. When they finally reached a safe place to rest, he dropped Porcupine on the ground and gasped, "Dang it, I thought we'd get him free that time."

Porcupine shivered, both from anger and from the cold air against his skin. "Next time I'll stab twice as many."

"Ain't your fault." He paused a moment to bite at a flea. Then he took a long look at Porcupine's pale skin. "You gotta be careful how you fight these white folk. You can't just get angry and charge in all the time. You let the anger take control, the next thing you know, we'll all be white."

Celeste's voice played through Jan's mind as she closed the book: "Tsaksoenok, not Kwakiutl." Even Rick, with his fascination with all things Native, had never found a reference to the Tsaksoenok tribe. At least, not among the tribes that still existed today. She placed the book back in the bottom of her locker.

When Jan arrived in Celeste's room, the vampire was visibly angry. "I've been waiting for two and a half hours. When will I be released?"

In as professional a voice as she could manage, Jan said, "I know. I told them to delay your discharge."

Celeste's eyes narrowed. "Isn't that a bit petty? Why not let me go and put this whole thing behind you."

Jan dropped the small bag she was carrying down and lowered her voice. "Why did you take Rick?"

"What?"

"Is this how you get back at us? For Ishi? For all the things we did to you and your people?"

The next time she spoke, Celeste's voice had a scalpel's edge. "My people are dead, Doctor Christopher. They are gone. Do you know what it's like to have *nobody?* Do you really believe that taking Rick from you could even begin to return what I've lost? I took him because he asked me to. He begged me to. Don't flatter yourself into thinking that my choice had anything to do with you or your people."

More than anything, Jan wanted to hate this woman. She wanted to hate her for what she had taken and for what she was willing to throw away. She had lived for centuries, seen more than any normal person ever could. It was selfish. Her entire lifestyle was selfish and cruel and cold.

And she couldn't hate her. No matter how deeply she looked for rage, all she found was pity.

"If you have no further questions?" Celeste asked with mock politeness. Jan was silent, so she stood to leave. "Thank you for your help," she said bitterly, extending a hand.

Jan nodded. Then, with one swift movement, she brought her hand up into Celeste's.

The vampire jerked back, gasping in surprise as a drop of blood dripped from her fingertip. "What is this?" she demanded, staring at her hand.

"A porcupine quill," Jan answered. She pulled the glucose meter out of the bag. Then she pulled out the fat package of quills she had picked up from the craft store.

Celeste watched in shock as Jan calmly checked her blood sugar. "Three-eighty," she said, shaking her head. "Still a bit high."

She pulled another quill from the package. "I'll get the syringe ready. You'll do the actual injection. You need to practice." She smiled evilly. "It's going to hurt."

Celeste seemed more fascinated than concerned as Jan shoved the black-tipped quill into her stomach.

She reached over with a pair of scissors and trimmed off most of the quill, leaving only a half-centimeter protruding from the skin. "They're hollow," she explained. "So you can inject right through them."

She smiled again. "In the future, though, I'd suggest you trim off the barb first. Otherwise it's going to hurt even more coming out."

There was some bleeding, but it healed within a few seconds, once Jan tore the quill free.

To Celeste's questioning expression, Jan answered, "I read one of your stories, and I remembered what you said about different vampires. Why would a Christian crucifix work on an Indian? But after reading that story, I guessed this might work."

"It's my totem," Celeste whispered, fingering the worn stone on her necklace.

"We read about Ishi in an anthropology class," Jan said. "You're like him, aren't you? The last one of your people."

She nodded.

Jan took a deep breath. For an instant, she felt a hint of the loneliness and despair that Celeste must have felt, watching her family, her friends, all of her people as they slowly died out. Every day she spent on the Kwakiutl reservation must be a reminder that *her* people had vanished centuries before.

She leaned across the table. "You've got a choice. You can give up, or you can survive. And if you die, then the Tsaksoenok die with you. You're all that's left."

"I see." There was a long silence, during which time Celeste studied the glucose meter and the bag of porcupine quills. Finally, she reached out and grabbed the quills, tucking them into her front pocket. "I will never forgive you for giving me back that choice." But it was said without real malice. "I can hear Coyote laughing his scrawny little ass off about this one."

After a while, she looked up and examined Jan. For the first time there was nothing predatory in her stare. "And what about your own crisis of spirit? What about Rick?"

Jan shook her head sadly. Like Celeste, Rick had been given a choice. He had let fear and selfishness dictate that choice. But it was still his choice. "He's like Ishi," she said, stretching her arms as she stood to go. "Pages in a book."

❄

Jim C. Hines has worked as a greenskeeper, a research assistant, a crisis counselor, and a college instructor. He began writing in 1995 and collected his first rejection letter from this very magazine. Now, nearly half a decade later, he is happy to have come full circle. His publication credits include *Diabetes Forecast* and *Pulp Eternity*. He lives in Michigan with a trio of mentally disturbed cats, but eventually plans to move west in search of yet another job.

Alicia Austin's work is well-known and loved by sf and fantasy fans. She and Jinx Beers run Fantasies Unlimited, a studio in southern California which publishes Alicia's cards, limited-edition prints, and other artwork. In addition to art drawn from fantasy and folklore, she is frequently inspired by western, Native American, Asian, and African themes.

Editor's Note: a normal blood sugar reading is about 100.

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Well Enough

by John DeVera

One morning I was plodding up the trail from the stream with buckets sloshing heavily on either end of the pole across my shoulders, when Branwynn approached me with a pout that almost took her from gorgeous down to merely beautiful. "What's the matter?" I asked my sister, pausing only long enough to resettle the pole. "It's plain something's bothering you."

Branwynn's pout broke into a fantastic sob of woe. "Bort and I shall never be married!" If the ground had not been so dirty I swear she would have thrown herself down upon it. "His father wants a dowry far greater than Father could ever afford. I don't know what we shall do!"

"Keep whispering and giggling whenever we send you to the mill for some flour, I guess," I huffed as I made my way up an especially steep portion of the trail, losing a few splashes of water out of the buckets. Branwynn would have had more sympathy from me if I had not heard this litany so often from Father who, having given up on me, still dreamed of scraping enough together to make a decent dowry for Branwynn.

Branwynn was hardly bright, but she knew when to change tactics well enough. "But you're so smart, Karya. Why, I bet you're thinking of something right now."

"I'm thinking," I said with some effort, "that if we had someone with a back as strong as your desire to wed Bort, we could dig a well close to the house and I wouldn't have to make this trip."

"Karya, you're not even *trying* to help me get a dowry."

I concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other the last few yards until I could lower the buckets with a grunt onto the plank table in front of the waist-high cistern. I then took a moment to catch my breath, leaning against the cistern. It was Father's finest work, made when he was in his prime. During the Drenching, it would fill to the top and provide for us for many months, but if I didn't regularly make the trip down to the stream twice a day, the cistern would run dry just about the middle of Drought. The cistern had been the first half of the project — a well was meant to be dug afterwards. But before that had happened, my mother had died and with her any ambitions my father might have had.

Branwynn helped me empty the water and we watched the ripples settle down into a smooth pool where we could see our reflections. It was painfully obvious that when Branwynn was born she had received not only her own share of physical beauty but mine as well. And why shouldn't such a beauty as she marry a strong, decent man and provide the world with children worth looking at?

I determined to help her. "Now then, dear sister, where does money come from?"

"You earn it," she sighed.

"Or you bargain, or you borrow, or you beg or you steal," I added. "But however you get it, it has to come from someone. Now who around here might have money to begin with?" You could almost hear the cogs and pulleys in her brain squeak with unaccustomed use. Finally she shrugged. "Bort's father is a man of means."

"But not so well meaning as to lend money for a dowry to marry his own son."

Branwynn thought some more. "The butcher's well off," she suggested hopefully.

I chuckled. "He wouldn't give us flies from the offal. Not since Father accused him of selling mule meat."

"Well, it was strange that the butcher had so much meat right after he bought that broken down mule from Bort's father."

We fell silent for a blissful moment. Then I stood up, hands on my hips, stretching my back and said, "That leaves the Nix."

Branwynn's eyes grew wide. "The Nix in the river? Do you think she would give me enough for a dowry?"

I couldn't hold the laughter in. After I dried the corners of my eyes with the dirty sleeve of my once-white tunic and caught my breath I said, "No faery ever gives away anything. You know that, Wynn. Besides, knowing our poor excuse for a stream, it would be our luck if the Nix were as much a pauper

as you and I."

"But supposing there is a treasure," Branwynn persisted. "How are we to get it from the Nix?"

I sighed and told her, "You bake some honey-cakes with just a hint of rosemary in them. I'll pack a bit of a picnic for us, and we'll go lay about the meadow by the lightning-blasted tree next to the stream. If you bake those cakes as well as you usually do," I told her, "the scent will have the Nix's mouth watering in no time."

"Do you really think she'll give up her treasure for my honey-cakes?"

"Of course not, you loon. But first we've got to get her attention. And let's not forget to bring some salt!"

I had always wondered at the stories of pooks and faeries having treasure. Where did they get them? Sure enough, you would expect the kobolds to have gold, since they are extraordinary miners by nature, but where does a kelpie get his silver bridle, or a pook get his jewels? Did the Old Ones trade with each other? If they did, what did they trade? Did a Nix offer a drowned baby in return for a pot of gold? Perhaps a pook could collect enough milk from the slim offerings we all left at our back doors to pay for a jewel that the kobolds probably consider quite routine.

Branwynn did not leave me to my musings long. "Of course the Nix has treasure. *Everyone* knows that the Nix has treasure. But hardly anyone ever sees her so how could we hope to find her treasure?" It was a common enough game for little ones to dig holes all over creation trying to find a local faery's cache. But Branwynn was too much the prissy beauty of the village to soil her skirt looking for the Nix. I had spent many hours spying on the Nix, and looking for the other Old Ones. I knew enough about kelpies and nixes to hold my own.

"No nix worth the little wet corner of her apron would hide her treasure where we might find it. She'll have to tell us. Perhaps we can offer something in trade."

Branwynn held her hand to her mouth in a over-dramatic gesture. "You don't mean my first-born child, do you?"

"Of course not, silly. Why would a Nix want something like that, anyway? She gets enough drownings from brokenhearted damsels, conceited reflection-gazers and greedy dogs. I doubt your first-born would fetch more than a splash of water."

Artwork by Rob alexander

"Then what do we have to offer?"

"Leave that to me. Let's just get her attention first."

We made our way up to the meadow. The day was warm enough and little red flowers, useful for concocting liniments, dotted the green grass of the meadow. The stream was lively here as it frolicked from one stony fall after another. There was, I also knew, a deceptively deep pool where the Nix was wont to nap. We spread out a cloth and sat to lunch, Branwynn making much of the cheese, milk and cakes that she laid out carefully. I myself was careful to position the salt where I could reach it. We had lost half our store of cakes to Father who wouldn't let us leave without giving him "a crumbling or two." Still, the gentle breeze carried a tickle of the delicious aroma over to the stream when I noticed a flicker of light amongst the eddies. Branwynn followed my gaze and stiffened as she noticed the beautiful woman hiding in the shadows of the far side of the stream. I looked at her and with a tilt of my head signaled for her to ignore the faery.

Perhaps more loudly than I needed to, I said boldly to Branwynn, "My, this is lovely cake you've baked." Then I whispered through lips stiffened in a tight smile, "Whatever you do, don't say the word 'pook'." She looked puzzled at that, but Branwynn was used to trusting others to think for her.

"Yes, I even baked in the rosemary you asked for." In her turn, she artfully said, without moving her lips at all that I could notice, "Okay. 'Atether you say. You're the snart one." I got the impression that she must have practiced this with Bort, whispering in the presence of his father. Our Nix moved out of the shadows and walked delicately over the running water to the near bank. We did our best to pay her little heed. She was used to being ignored, for it was considered rude to speak to a nix or kelpie, since they could not respond without showing their souls. Since the Old Ones are not born and do not die, the way God's children do, they must carry their souls, like small pebbles, about with them. Pooks and kobolds are clever enough to hide their souls, but the water faeries have no pockets and are such homebodies that they take to carrying their souls in their mouths and only remove them if they must speak.

"And this cheese we laid up last season has aged nicely. It goes quite well with the honey-cakes."

"Well, Karya, that's your doing. You have always had a fine hand with cheese."

"Thank you so much, Wynn. You're too kind." If the Nix knew anything about people, I do believe she would have been very suspicious, for I doubt Branwynn and I had ever been so pleasant with each other. But it had the desired effect of being so uninteresting a conversation that the Nix had fixated on the food completely. When Branwynn poured the goat's milk from the pitcher, the Nix audibly sighed.

"Tell me, Wynn," I began carefully when the Nix had wandered close to us. "Did you leave any of this honey-cake for the ... uh, er ..."

"The brownie?" suggested Branwynn helpfully.

"No, you know what I mean," I helplessly waved my hands about, trying to shape a thought. "The Old One, the Little Person. Oh, why can't I think of it?" I broke off my words just as I broke a honey-cake in two and raised a piece carelessly in the direction of the Nix.

"You don't mean a wight, do you?" tried Branwynn.

"No, no, of course not." I brought the precious piece of honey-cake to my lap just as the Nix began reaching for it. She was so close now we could see the gray of her stormy eyes and smell the heady perfume of her long blonde hair. "Not a wight. A ... you know. The ones that change shape. The Old Ones who sometimes chop a cord of wood for you when you leave a bowl of milk on the doorstep ...."

"You don't mean a kewpie?"

"Not a kewpie," I said as I again waved the piece of cake toward the Nix. "I just can't think of its name. A pah ... a puh ..."

The Nix grabbed at the cake, missed, and in exasperation shouted, "Pookah!"

With that, a dull, earth-colored pebble, no bigger than a roly-bug, popped from the Nix's pouting lips. I grabbed it and it was hidden in the tiny pocket of my skirt before the Nix had realized that it had popped out of her mouth.

I do believe the Nix would have tried to do us some violence, she was that angry with me. But I took the salt (a precious commodity at any time, but an invaluable one on this occasion) from its small wooden bowl and threw some of it in front of the Nix. She knew what it was, and for a moment we almost saw the Nix's true form. It was watery and slippery and black. But the vision shivered and dissolved in the blink of an eye so that we could only swear to the enraged figure of a beautiful woman, hands clenched at her side in fury. But she came no closer, knowing that I was armed with the salt which remained in the bottom of the bowl.

I took out the pebble and showed it carefully to the Nix. The pebble was

Artwork by Rob alexander

warm and very smooth, but it was certainly no jewel. It looked like any of the countless pebbles worn smooth in the stream. The Nix's glare focused first on the pebble, and then, more seriously, on me. When she spoke again, her voice was as quiet as a breeze but sounded liquid. "I'll be having that back, now. It's no good to you."

I thought I could see something else in her eyes. Maybe hurt pride. Maybe fear. Whatever it was, I softened to it. "You're right. It belongs to you, and you'll have it back."

I thought Branwynn was going to say something, but she thought better of it and stifled a comment with her fist at her mouth.

"Then give it here, before I take it into my head to cause you a mischief!"

I withdrew the pebble slightly, and she visibly started. "You've lost something precious," I said, knowing that to mention the word soul to an Old One is an extreme offense, "and I've found it for you. I would think some gratitude in order."

She fairly shrieked, "You tricked me, you dry and ugly child!" I thought it amusing that to her, dry was an insult. When I made to withdraw the pebble once again, always keeping the bowl of salt between us, the Nix held up her hands, both white and pleading. She consciously made an effort and softened her voice, "What would you like, that a poor river Nix that hasn't even got a decent pair of shoes could offer you?"

That was an exaggeration, since her shoes were finer than I had ever seen, soft green slippers that glistened like sunlight on a dappled stream. "I'll have your name, Old One."

Branwynn and the Nix gasped simultaneously so that I almost laughed. My smile was enough, though, to make the Nix fear. "What would you be wanting my name for? That's a poor trade."

"It might. But if the villagers knew your name, you wouldn't be able to lure any of them to your home, would you?" The Nix knew that she was caught. She glanced to both sides as if seeking an escape, but she couldn't leave without her soul. With that precious pebble in my hands, she knew she could never be safe. "You wouldn't be able to creep into houses at night and steal babies. In fact, there's a priest or two who could use your name to cast you out of the river. Now, that's a puzzlement. What does a Nix do when she loses her river?"

The Nix shuddered at the question and then fell to her knees. "Please, be kind. I've lived near enough to you and your kind for so very long, and I've never done the evil that others might. I've blessed your water and kept it pure and safe. Many's the babe that I've guided back home when I could easily have taken them into my cellars. And I've always been good to you, for you have honored the Old Ones well enough," but she added, "before now."

She was that good a liar that I almost weakened. "Hold on, Nix. If you haven't been as bad as you could, then maybe it's because we've been careful enough. We leave the gifts and the offerings as the rules and traditions say we should. I'll still have your name, as you've taken what you could before now from us, and I'll have something back."

"Not my name, Child of the New God. Have a bit of mercy. I've naught else."

"If you have nothing else," I said with measured delight, "then I'll have your name!"

The Nix thought a moment. If I asked again, she would be unable to resist. Those were the time honored rules that bound her to the river and bound us to our duty. "I have somewhat else," she let slip grudgingly.

"I like this, then," I said to Branwynn. "The Nix has somewhat else. Then I won't ask for your name a third time, if you can offer me something better."

"My own is buried deep where only I can find it. I'll tell you where it is, if you give me what is mine."

"Your treasure? That might be a good trade, but how am I to know if the treasure you have stolen is worthy, or if it can be reached?"

The Nix looked grieved that I would distrust her so far, but she answered. "It is gold of the river, pure and clean. There is enough to make your kind wealthy. And it is buried near, but deep. No tricks to guard it, but earth and clay."

I looked to the pebble and then to the Nix who watched eagerly. "Agreed," I declared as I tossed the pebble in a high arc toward the Nix. She caught it gracefully and started immediately toward the stream.

I made to follow, but she turned back and said, "Three paces toward the setting sun from where your father built his cistern. Dig deep and you'll find my gold. But 'ware you should approach my home again without token or charm, else I'll have your flesh to barter with, and waterlogged at that!" She disappeared suddenly as her green-slippered foot touched the stream.

"We did it!" Branwynn rushed to me and hugged me tight. She pulled away to arms' length and looked at me seri-

Artwork by Rob alexander

ously. "But who's going to dig for the gold? I'm not strong enough to wield pick and shovel."

I laughed. "Look not to me, sister. I'm not going to break a single nail digging for gold I have no use for. You want it, get Bort to dig it out for you."

I turned to the cloth that was now slightly disarrayed and began to pack our lunch. Branwynn turned and made straight for town to tell Bort the good news. He would be to our place on the morrow and Branwynn would break more than one fingernail lifting dirt out of the hole in buckets and carrying it to the garden. I set four of the larger honey-cakes in a line and placed a wedge of good cheese and a bowl of milk on either side of the line. The rest of our fare I sorted and packed into a bag made from the cloth.

As I prepared to leave the meadow I turned to the stream and called out. "Nix! Nix! Nix! You've done my sister a good turn. I apologize for the salt, but it was all I had and all I could do to help her. I've left you the cakes and somewhat you might enjoy. You and I are creatures of tricks and turns. But you're beautiful and I'm not, and as such is the case, I'll not apologize for playing my tricks on you. But I'll give you my promise: there will always be a bowl of milk at my door for you, when you are thirsty."

A reply wafted back from the shadows by the stream, "And the well your sister and her sweetheart dig shall receive the blessings of this Nix."

❄

JOHN DEVERA, who lives in the 'burbs of Bakersfield, California, earns his

daily bread teaching teenagers how to read and write. While he dreams of becoming a millionaire some day, his chosen profession and innate ability to choose the wrong lottery numbers have so far worked against him. He consoles himself with the love of a beautiful wife and two alarmingly charming children. The inspiration for this story comes from the family legend, that despite being raised by Philipinos, he is truly Irish.

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Exit, Stage Right

by Steve McCue

Artwork by Mark Poole

Disaster! I lost work-study because I let the guys from Delta Psi into the anatomy lab, and they threw an "Irish Wake" party, and then left a Bud Lite in the fist of one of the cadavers. So I went to my Uncle Chuck, who is just a grunt in the State Transportation Department, but he's also the Treasurer of his union, and he got me a job as a toll-taker on the Interstate, maybe ten miles from school.

"Eleven to seven," says the boss toll-taker, "graveyard shift. You'll get plenty of studying done, kid. Don't pull any wiseacre tricks like switching discount tokens for quarters or I'll flick you out faster than I would a fuzz ball. Got it?"

He was big and bald, and chewing gum was probably the only exercise he ever got. He had a lopsided smile, which some people have when they know more than they're saying. I was wary but I really did need the job.

Night number one. I drop a slice of pizza on my pants and forget sugar for the coffee and I wonder how I'll answer nature's call. The chief didn't say a thing about relief of any kind. But I managed to digest an entire chapter of **VEBLEN'S ECONOMICS FOR THE NINETIES** and three pages of **PHYSICS 101** before I dozed off. There is zippo traffic, maybe six cars in the first hour, then after twelve, I didn't see anybody for forty-five minutes.

I think I've really stepped into that proverbial substance, and that this gig is going to be snooze / study not work / study, a definite improvement in my financial, physical and educational existence. And then comes along the icing on the cake.

She's blonde, and she's a little snockered, and she's working her way through college at the Bent Elbow Lounge downtown.

"I'll see you every night on my way back to school," she tells me.

"Free toll for you, my Lady," I say back.

"Free beer for you, my Sire," and she puts her little Civic into gear and is gone.

I shut my eyes, and put my feet up on the cash register. I am certain I have discovered Paradise here on the Interstate — snooze / study / score. This just keeps getting better and better.

It's the loud idling of a diesel which pulls me out of my sleep an hour later. I look out my grimy window and all I can see is the door of a highly-polished truck waiting to pay the toll. I slide back the window and reach out for payment. Even fully awake, I am not fascinated by truck drivers, so I don't bother to look up to see who's paying me. The coin scorches my skin and I drop it and yelp like a cat trapped in a V-8 fan belt.

Since being a little kid, I've hated being burned more than any other kind of pain. And I'll tell you, even though I held onto that fried coin for only a second, it burned like...well, like hell. My hand was branded for life. I was about to go through the booth window after this jerk, but he's in gear and roars off leaving just fumes to smell and tail lights to look at. I can see enough, as the truck fades away, that it's carrying livestock, maybe cattle or horses. I'm left alternately blowing on my seared hand and yelling at the truck.

Later, after the coin cooled, I picked it up off the floor. It figures that he hadn't even given me real money. This coin is clearly a joke, maybe from a casino or an arcade. It features an ugly guy wearing a crown with a snake

around his neck.

In the morning, I tell the boss about it. He smiles that knowing smile again.

"Old heat-up-the-coin trick. Probably used his cigarette lighter. Hey, you weren't sleeping when he pulled in, were you?"

I lied. It made sense.

Back at the dorm, I put on a whole lot of first aid cream, but my hand still hurt, so I went over to the infirmary despite the place having a reputation of never letting a student out alive. They told me to quit trying to freebase on University property, gave me another band aid, and said they wouldn't call my parents — this time.

I took in two out my three classes and was ready to find the woman with the Civic downtown. I put on my best L.L. Bean, non-polyester shirt, shaved close and used a bit of my roommate Harry's mouthwash, which he had "borrowed" from me the previous week. Harry, sensing my success at finding a female, asked to go along. Harry has a way of horning in and, as with the mouthwash, he might well try to "borrow" my new-found female friend. Like your relatives, you don't get to pick your roomie at a state school. I'm the only guy on the floor who has to lock his desk.

"Debbie here?" I ask the gorilla wiping down the bar.

He slowly lifts his head and I'm looking at a face which has all the beauty of a crumpled paper bag. Big tears start dripping from someplace in the middle, just about where the A & P logo would be printed.

"She was just a cute kid, good girl. Never made no kind of trouble no way. She even shared her tips with the cleanup guy. It just ain't fair."

"Well, what the...?" I sputter. Even I know when somebody is being serious, when there's a real problem.

"Killed, gone, bingo. Up came her number. Poor little honey did herself in," he says.

I'm a cynic where dating is concerned. I've had women do just about anything possible to keep from going out with me. One resourceful woman I pursued for a date, tied her old man's pit bull to the front porch railing just to keep me away from the door. I went around back, but that was where they kept the Doberman. I can handle rejection. I keep telling myself it builds character. My mother told me that. She didn't say whether she meant good or bad character, though.

"Geeze, I'm sorry. What the heck happened?"

He puts his face in his hands and lets out a sob. I now believe what he's telling me. Some reactions can't be faked. I just back out the door. Later, sitting in my Chevy, I had a word with my higher power about her. I hoped it helped.

The boss is waiting for me in the control house. He has the same knowing smirk on his face.

"Remember, nobody goes through the gate without paying the toll — especially not your college buddies."

We have a short discussion about my honor. We decide that he doesn't have much respect for it. We decide, too, that I should understand that.

Things weren't any more active that night. Six cars in three hours left plenty of time to study, but I couldn't concentrate because of that poor girl and what happened to her. Then this crewcut, high school kid in a Porsche comes through the gate.

"Here's a quarter for the guy behind me," he says and winks. I'm befuddled, which is right in his plan. He's gone before I can speak.

"You nuts?" asks the geezer with bifocals who comes in right after him. "Nobody pays my way in the world." He gives me another quarter and putts out of the gate and down the exit.

So, I've got an extra quarter. I put it up on the shelf to save for some poor slob who doesn't have the toll. Unlike my roomie Harry, if I'm not totally honest at least I'm nervous. I'll let the guy on the next shift filch it.

I try studying again and become absorbed in why a totally Quantum theory can't be proved, that I don't hear the truck pull up. The honk from the horn sends me up six flights in the one-flight toll booth. I look out and I can't be sure it's the same truck as last night but it does smell the same. I think it's him so I'm relieved when he hands me a paper dollar. Even though it's cool and crisp, I get in the drawer quick and give him his change.

"Thanks," I said. "Hey, you didn't happen to come through here last night, did you?" Who says there are no dumb questions. This certainly sounds dumb to me.

"The love of money is the root of all evil," comes the answer from up there, high in the cab. The voice is deep and crusty, with a tone of absolute assurance. I rise up on my toes, trying to see him, but the window of black glass goes up, the engine growls and I have just enough time to open the gate before he's through it. I'm alone again with his exhaust, which is more noxious than diesel, more putrid than skunk spray.

There's a bumper sticker plastered on the dirty back door. It says: "Since I gave up hope, I feel much better."

There, alone in the night, it is the smell that is left over that turns my curiosity to fear. At first, I just wondered what was down that exit. Now I'm afraid to find out. You see I was brought up a Friday fish-eating Catholic. An upbringing with the trappings of ceremony and the fear of Hell.

I'm nervous, but my true nature as a wise guy comes through and I ask the next driver. "On your way to your just reward, huh?"

He looks at me with sad eyes behind the granny glasses, loaded with hurt.

"For all my life, I have. This is the best answer, I know."

I want to question him, to find out more. But he pays, then is gone, down the exit.

I just stand there, wondering. These people. What are they doing? The key is that damned truck. Yeah, right. Tomorrow night, I'll ask him and I won't let him through until he tells me what's going on. I have this flash about curiosity and dead cats, but it fades away quickly.

The next night. I can't study. I just keep listening for noises from down there around the corner and hear none. A few people come through, and they don't seem to notice that I study them like they are under a microscope. They all have blank, too-long-on-the-highway expressions, and I try to be nice to them.

"Have a good trip?" I ask a guy with spread and bald, behind the wheel of a classic 57 Chevy.

"Oh yeah, thanks, right," he says. He appears to be dazed, and then he's gone.

His license plate is from Indiana. The motto is "Wanderer." I wonder. He "wanders." I could contemplate this for hours but brakes hiss. He's here. This time I'm going to see who this wise guy is.

"Open up the window, pal," I order, flashing my toll-taker ID. I'm up on my toes. He lowers the window just a bit and just like last night, he flips a coin out to me. It lands on the ground and this time I spit on my finger before I

touch it. It doesn't sizzle — it freezes.

"Listen, pal," I say. "You're not going anywhere until we have a few words.

He guns the engine and comes up right to the gate. I don't push the button even though he could smash the thing into mini slivers. He keeps the engine roaring for a minute and then he backs up. The window still hasn't come down.

"I have paid," says this hollow voice inside. "You open up. It's the rule."

"Oh, rule? Who says?"

He guns the engine again and the cab starts rocking back and forth and then smoke starts seeping from under the truck and puffing out of the cab windows. Over the roar of the truck, he yells down at me.

"Now, or never."

What I say just comes out, and I'm sorry just as soon as I say it.

"Ever, not never," and I pull back into my little booth. I'm mildly scared. I leave real terror for serious stuff, like finals. It's not until out of the smoke and the noise comes a screaming voice, tinged with tongues of fire lashing at me, that I go to condition red.

"Is now ever?" he yells at me, then laughs deeply, like it comes straight up from his gizzard.

I know when I'm outclassed. I push that button as hard as I can and damn the slowness of the speed of light in opening that gate. Hissing and puffing, the truck roars past me, leaving me putting my arm up to protect my eyes and retching at the stink of rotten eggs. But I force myself to lean out and look at the rear end of the rig. Plastered on the back door are more bumper stickers, lots of them. I spy another quote. It says: "He who dies with the most toys, wins."

Nice philosophy. I wonder what he's really trying to tell me. I lean over and pick up the coin that he threw at me, and I think that things are making sense when I read the inscription, right next to old George Washington's head on the quarter. I should have noticed it before. Where "In God We Trust" should have been etched is written instead, "The Hell We Do".

I wash my hands for an hour trying to get the feel of that coin off my skin. I feel like I've touched real filth and think I may never get clean. I explain to my stupidvisor, I mean supervisor, that he could find another glad-hander to work that exit.

"Kid," he says, "you don't worry your undergraduate brain. I just got a memo from old HQ. We're shutting up your exit. You know how things are at the State, it takes a long time before the word gets out. Seems the bridge that exit emptied onto has been closed for weeks."

He's doing what you might call smiling. I think he likes putting me out of a job.

"We'll call you, okay?" he says. "Now go back to school and study hard, sonny."

So the state has my uniform back, and I'll be working hard to stay in good grades. I went down to the snack bar and they put me on the morning shift. At least I'll earn a few bucks, and even though I won't be able to study on the job, that's okay with me.

I thought a lot about that truck and that exit for the next few weeks. But then it started to fade from my mind. I knew I'd forget the place and just chalk that truck up to an imagination primed by being alone and tired. By midterms, I was concentrating on History 236, Math 104, and nothing else. That is, until Thursday night.

I had my feet stuck up on the windowsill with the light at my back really hunkering down into **BARBER'S MODERN ECONOMISTS** when Bill Rathbun slammed back my door.

"It's Harry. Geeze, I think he's really

Artwork by Mark Poole

hurt."

I followed Bill down the hall to the lounge. The police were already giving him CPR as Bill and I came in.

"What the hell?"

"Electrocuted," said the fireman. "Stay away from that soda machine. Must be a loose wire or something."

I could see Harry's face when the fireman came up for air. His eyes were open and I just knew that nothing was going to help. His face was frozen into permanent surprise.

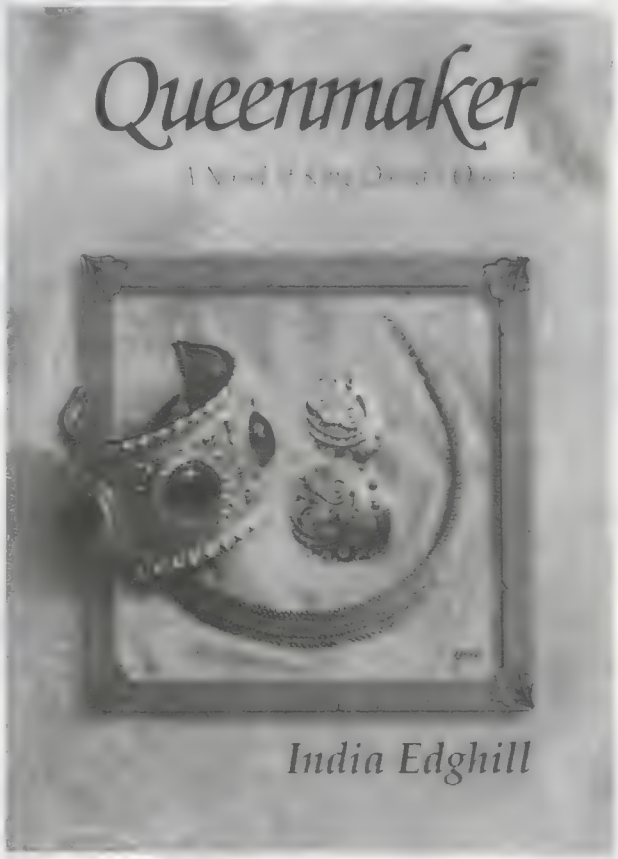
A few minutes later they took him away. He was gone and gone good. Light-fingered Harry became the only person in the USA to be zapped by a soda machine in fifteen years. I'll tell you, it was strange, and nobody, I mean nobody, could figure it out. The machine company brought in experts and the University even had its whizzes from the Electrical Engineering Department check out that machine. It was operating perfectly, no shorts, no nothing.

What had happened to old Harry hit me two weeks later in the shower. You see, I had gone to get my clean — sort of clean — underwear out of my top drawer. It should have been there. I had taken it and buried it down deep among my jockey shorts and I never dreamed he would look there. After all, even a sneak thief should have some scruples. Not Harry, though. He had rummaged through my bureau, found that coin — the devil's medium of exchange — and dropped it in the soda machine. Poor Harry, dead, all for the love of a Dr. Pepper. I'll tell you this: I check my change very, very carefully now. Someday I'm going to read about somebody who gets strangled in a phone booth or poisoned by glue out of a stamp machine. Not me though, I'll pay by check.

❄

Steve McCue resides in Niantic, Connecticut, with his family, eight miles from the oldest toll road in the nation. His stories and essays have appeared in publications such as *Northeast Magazine, Good Old Days,* and one bizarre essay in *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, which he thought was satire and which they took for reality.

Mark Poole has a B.A. degree in fine arts from the University of South Carolina. His early influences were Marvel Comics, sf, and fantasy novels; after discovering sf conventions, he has won awards and been published.



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The Dragon of North 24th Street

by Marian Allen

In the year four-hundred-and-something, St. Patrick lured the serpents of Ireland into the sea with the playing of his harp. He may have sung a bit, too, I couldn't say.

And where did they go? Where else but America, like so many Irish after them. It wasn't America then, of course, but the land was there, if the name was not.

So they went to America, where they had room to spread themselves. They mingled with whatever native snakes they couldn't eat, the world turned on its axis, and life went on.

Now, among the serpents was one who was so old he still had his four legs which, as you know, serpents lost after that business in the Garden of Eden.

This serpent was as long as the night before your wedding, as black as the inside of a cow's second stomach, and as evil as your sweetheart paints your friends. In fact, if this serpent wasn't a dragon, he would do until a dragon came along; and he was, in very fact, Beltran: the devil's own wicked uncle, the one the devil's mother never let the family mention when they came to tea.

Now, for sixteen hundred years (give or take a hundred), Beltran lay about, creating a general nuisance. He made his home beside the Ohio River, near the top of Kentucky, and, if he didn't start more fights between the settlers and the Indians than they started between themselves, I'd like to know who did.

But, in spite of him, the land was settled, and the city of Louisville grew up. Beltran retreated underground during a particularly rambunctious period in the city's history, when he felt his deviltry would only be superfluous, and took a nap of a century or so.

At last he woke. This was about 1934, I'd say it was. 1934 or '35. No, I tell a lie, it was 1933, and I'll tell you how I know: In 1910, a girl was born to Patrick and Mary Kelley, and they named her Pearl, and that girl grew up and married John Anthony Sullivan, and that very Pearl Sullivan was exactly 23 years

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

of age at the time I'm speaking of.

So, in 1933, Pearl and Johnny Sullivan lived in a sort of a tenement on North 24th Street in the West End — that is to say, the "poor" section — of Louisville. Mind you, this was the heart of the Great Depression, and nobody had money, but it was still fashionable for folks in other parts of town to look down on the West-Enders.

Not that anybody who tried it would recommend putting on airs with Pearl — or any of the Sullivans, for that matter. "We're no better than anybody else" (so said the Sullivans), "but we're darned if we aren't every bit as good."

This sort of a tenement where Pearl and Johnny lived was one of four, each a block long, each at right angles to the next, so that they made a square of themselves, with a bit of a courtyard in the middle, and the Necessary Facilities in a corner of that. One of the buildings housed respectable working people with families, like Pearl and Johnny; the one to the left was filled with another type altogether, Catholics and drunkards, wall-paperers and house-painters and all that sort; the next was a whorehouse, pure and simple. The fourth building, the one to the right of Pearl and Johnny's, had been gutted by fire, and that was where Beltran was quartered. He might have started the fire that ruined the building and drove out the tenants, but perhaps he didn't, after all. The devil himself can't account for all the trouble in the world, and that is God's own truth.

The day came at last when Beltran woke; come to think of it, maybe it was the noise that did it.

It began with Pearl Sullivan sitting in the courtyard, on a hard-backed kitchen chair, with a butcher knife in her lap that her granny had handed down to her. She brought out the chair and sat herself upon it early in the morning, as soon as Johnny was off to work. When the late-risers came out to use the facilities, there sat Pearl. Naturally, they asked her what she was doing, and Pearl was just the girl to tell them.

"There's a whore across the way," she said, with a nod that sent her red curls bobbing, "who's been making up to Johnny as he comes home from work."

"And?"

"I'm waiting for her to come down. Then I'm going to cut her heart from her body."

There was a brave soul or two who tried to persuade her out of it, but Pearl crossed her arms and set her jaw, and they gave it up.

Pearl had left a pan of oatmeal on the back burner of her wood stove, and a pitcher of milk in the ice box, so her children had plenty to eat. Along about noon, her older brother's youngest girl, Brenda, brought Pearl a thick slice of buttered bread and a mug of milk, and that was her lunch.

Brenda Sullivan, that I'm talking about now, heard about the siege whilst on her way to school. Being a girl of strong family feeling, she took the day off and came to her aunt's to care for Pearl's four children (ages 6, 5, 3, and 1) and lend moral support. She was ready to lend physical support, too, if need be: Brenda Sullivan was thirteen years old, with the build of a stevedore and bandages stuck on all over her, from where she'd had her skin broken in fist fights, especially across her knuckles.

At two, the whore leaned out of her window and called, in a quavering voice, "Pearl Sullivan!"

"I hear you," said Pearl. "Likewise, I see you, flaunting yourself in your kimono, and at this time of day! Come down, and lose your liver, or whatever part happens to fall out when I've opened you from stem to stern."

"Pearl, have mercy. I need to use the facilities."

"Go down to your Madame's parlor and use a spittoon. You've been making up to my man, and I'll not have it."

A little while later, a delegation approached Pearl from the house across the yard, consisting of two colleagues of the offender and their Madame.

They made a proposal: "If she promises ... if she swears by Almighty God she'll leave Johnny alone, not even to speak to him on the street, can she come down? She's having hysterics."

"She'll have worse than that, before I'm through with her."

"She won't be fit for work tonight."

Well, pipe-fitting or prostitution, if there was one thing Pearl respected it was work.

"Ah," she said, "let her come down, then. But if she breaks her promise, she's a dead woman."

"Thank you, Pearl! God bless you for a saint!"

And the whole matter was cleared up before Johnny got home that night. What Pearl said to *him* didn't take place in the courtyard, and has nothing to do with the story.

So perhaps it was the shouting that disturbed the dragon, but gradually he woke, and he woke hungry.

Now, I've said this dragon was wicked. He was so wicked he enjoyed making even himself suffer. He could have broken through the shell of a building, ripped open a tenement, and had a grand feed. As it was, he only clawed his way out of the basement and curled up in the middle of the ground floor to wait for morning.

When the men had left for work — those men who had work, or cared to do any — Beltran breathed a small spurt of flame and burned a hole in the wall large enough to stick his head out of.

Pearl's oldest girl, Katie, ran in from playing in the courtyard and screamed the news to her mother: "Ma! There's a dragon in the eyesore!" ("Eyesore" being what the tenants called the half-burned building Beltran was in.) "And he's sticking his head out into the yard! Right next to our wash!"

Another feature of the courtyard that I haven't mentioned yet were clothes-drying racks that looked like large umbrellas without the covering, and lines running from the ends of the ribs back to the central pole. There were a dozen of these constructions around the edge of the yard, and each woman had her usual.

Pearl didn't believe in dragons, but she did believe in her oldest girl. She put down her scrub brush, dried her hands on her apron, picked up the hatchet she used for splitting kindling, and went to see what was what.

And there he lay, with the head of him as big as a toothache. When he saw Pearl approaching with her hatchet, he puffed out a fireball, as a kind of warning.

Pearl stopped and let out a kind of warning of her own. "Dry that wash with your flame, and I'll thank you. Singe it, and may God have mercy on your soul."

The dragon lifted his head and spoke, which took Pearl a little by surprise, for she hadn't expected the creature to have human speech, only to understand it. "I am Beltran," he said. "I am Lord of this town, and all the populace belongs to me."

Pearl crossed her arms, the flat of her hatchet resting on her shoulder, and said, "I am a free citizen of the United States of America, and so are the rest of us. If you want to be a Lord, you've chosen a poor place to do it in."

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

With a moderate huff, Beltran engulfed Pearl's wash-rack in so hot a flame it left behind it nothing but a bit of smoldering stump.

Pearl narrowed her eyes, squared her jaw, and held her tongue. Her father raised no cowards, but her mother raised no fools.

Beltran rumbled, "Bring me, by ... say ... four o'clock ... of this day, a marriageable virgin, and the rest of you will be spared."

Pearl let that sit a moment, then said, "What do you mean by 'marriageable'? For if you mean she must have a dowry, you've chosen a worse time than you have a place."

"I mean she must be a woman, and still a virgin. Of an age and condition to breed, yet untouched."

"And you'll do what with her, may I ask?"

"I will drag her into my lair and consume her. I have a mighty hunger, and must feed from time to time, like any other creature."

"Will bread and milk and boiled pig's knuckles not do just as well?"

"They will not. And don't think you can trick me with a man in maiden's clothing, for it's been tried. Nor yet would I recommend anyone slipping out a door I can't see, for I'll know it, and my anger will be terrible." Beltran let out a thin roil of flame, that ran along the ground nearly to the toes of Pearl's stained and ragged house slippers. He closed his eyes. "By four o'clock this very day."

Naturally, all the tenants wanted to know what the dragon had said, so Pearl convened a meeting on the other side of the yard and told them.

Some wanted to go to the police, but they had to admit Pearl was right when she said, "It's scandal enough, having a whorehouse among us, without bringing in the police, as well."

They argued one plan, and they argued another, but nothing seemed safe except to give the dragon what he wanted. The only fair thing was to put the names of all the marriageable maidens in a hat and draw one out. This procedure ran afoul of objections — loudly countered — that this one and that one might be old enough, but she failed the second qualification.

Beltran, as full of sin as a pod is of peas, heard every word and he chuckled, for the squabbling was music to his ears.

The whores themselves felt pretty irrelevant, given the circumstances. They took up a collection between them to buy a plate of cold meat for whatever family ended up being bereaved. The thought was much appreciated.

And so matters stood, until school let out for the day. Then, who should stop by Pearl's for a bit of first aid before heading home but Brenda Sullivan herself. She had cut her knee on the teeth of a boy who had made an offensive remark. It wasn't a bad cut, but her mother tended to object to blood on the carpet, so she'd come to her aunt.

Pearl told her about the dragon and Brenda said, with a blush, "I've become a woman, Aunt Pearl. And, as for being untouched by a man —" she tapped her knee, the one with the bandage on it, "— let one try, is all I say."

Pearl's children, who were troubled by the discord in the yard, threw themselves upon their cousin and wailed. Katie, the oldest, cried, "The dragon's going to kill Brenda!"

"The dragon," said Pearl firmly, "is going to do nothing of the kind."

Now, the first thing Pearl did was drag her ten-gallon galvanized tub and place it on the smoking ruin of her

wash rack. Then she and Brenda and Katie carried buckets and buckets of water from the pump in the yard and emptied them into the tub.

Beltran opened his eyes a crack and growled, "What are you doing with that water, woman?"

"My wash, if it's all the same to you. You've burnt up everything clean I had in the world."

The dragon gave an evil snicker and closed his eyes again. "Four o'clock will be here before your water heats."

And so it was. At four o'clock, Beltran roused himself and rumbled, "Bring forth the sacrifice! Let the maiden be drawn before me! Her shrieks will pique my appetite! Her helpless struggles —"

He broke off his speech as Brenda Sullivan dropped the buckets she was carrying and strode to his side.

"I'm your maiden," she said, "and I've got your sacrifice in my hand." With that, she fetched him such a blow between the eyes it rattled his brain.

He opened his mouth to envelop Brenda in flaming ruin. Pearl, as she had done after washing every Monday, grasped the tub by its handle and tipped it over, and all the water ran into the channel cut by years of emptying, and most of it went down Beltran's gullet. He choked and he coughed, and then he roared in pain as Pearl, with her hatchet, pounded at his spine just where it became his neck; and Brenda, with Pearl's grandmother's butcher knife, struck at his eyes. He waved his claws about, making the women dodge out of his reach.

And then. From her retreat in the Sullivan apartment, Katie raised her voice in the shrill keening that had drawn so much adverse comment from the neighborhood. She began with "The Weaver's Song" and proceeded to "Eileen Aroon". Before she could even begin "The Quiet Land of Erin", Beltran gathered his four feet beneath him and burst from his lair. He leapt into the wind and, by the time you could blink, he was gone.

Brenda and Pearl ever afterward maintained it was their strategy and the fierceness of their blows that bested the dragon. The Catholics in the complex claimed the victory for the Holy Water they'd added to Pearl's buckets. But Katie Sullivan always said, and was defended in her position by everyone within earshot, that it was her singing that saved the day.

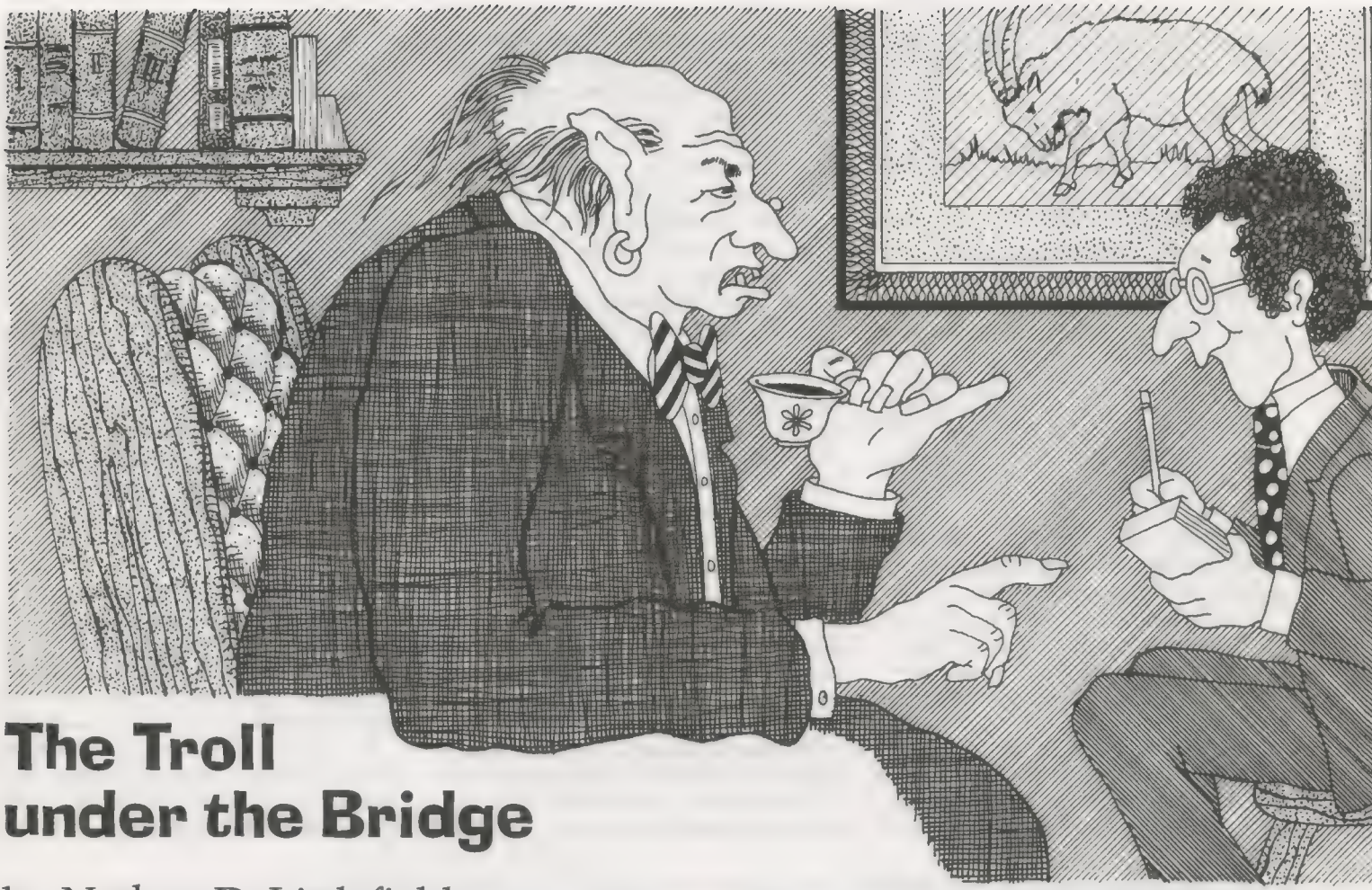
As for Beltran, he left the West End, left Louisville, left America altogether, and spent his life in a vain search for a corner of the globe that held no Irish. Or, at the very least, no Sullivans.

❄

Marian Allen writes science fiction, fantasy, mystery, humor, and horror. Allen has had three novels published on electronic disk, and her stories have appeared in print anthologies and in on-line and print magazines. She teaches the occasional noncredit Creative Writing course for university continuing education departments.

Lori Deitrick has been published in *Aboriginal Science Fiction* Magazine, and *Amazing Stories* Magazine. Her fantasy originals have won numerous awards and grace the walls in the homes of many collectors. She is also known for her sensitive portraiture and wildlife work. She shares a studio in Knoxville, Tennessee, with artist husband David Deitrick and three children.

Artwork by Lori Deitrick



The Troll under the Bridge

by Nathan D. Littlefield

I rapped on the large wooden door at precisely eight o'clock.

No answer.

I pounded louder.

Still there was no answer. I began to get worried. This interview was important and I didn't want to return to the office empty-handed. Impatiently, I stamped my feet on the little green welcome mat. The snow fell off in clumps. As I raised my hand to knock again, I heard a voice booming from somewhere deep within the old manor house.

"Quit banging," the voice commanded. "I'm coming."

Presently I heard the sound of a bolt being drawn, and the door opened a few inches. I glanced a couple of feet above me and saw a large eye peering down from the doorway. The size and color of the eye reminded me of one of my Aunt Emily's favorite bright red dinner plates that she would bring out on special occasions. The eye considered me for a moment.

"What do you want?" asked the voice.

"Um, are you the troll?" I asked, feeling rather intimidated.

"What?"

"Are you the troll?" I asked again. "The Troll under the Bridge?"

The door swung open and he towered before me, glaring down. He was massive, well over eight feet tall, and I couldn't help cringing. He was almost completely bald, with only a few tufts of graying hair sprouting here and there about his huge, irregularly shaped head. His nose was long and hooked at the end. I noticed that he was dressed in a rumpled tweed suit with a brown and white bow tie.

"Well, obviously I don't live under the bridge anymore." He gestured around at the big house and snow-covered lawn amid the great rolling pastures of the countryside. "Who's asking?"

"I had an appointment at eight," I reminded him. "You agreed to an interview."

"Oh," he said, removing a silver watch from his vest pocket at looking closely at it. "You're late. You were suppose to be here two minutes ago."

Before I could reply, he waved me inside and stepped back so that I could enter. I noticed he favored his right leg with a slight limp. I walked in and stood in the tastefully decorated foyer. A large potted fern occupied one corner, opposite a hat rack with a bowler perched on top.

"Maid's got the day off," said the troll, taking my coat and hat. He hung them on the rack and we walked into a spacious living room. The furniture was a bit threadbare, but the room exhibited an air of comfortable coziness. A fire blazed in the fireplace, pushing back the chill that hung near the frosted windows.

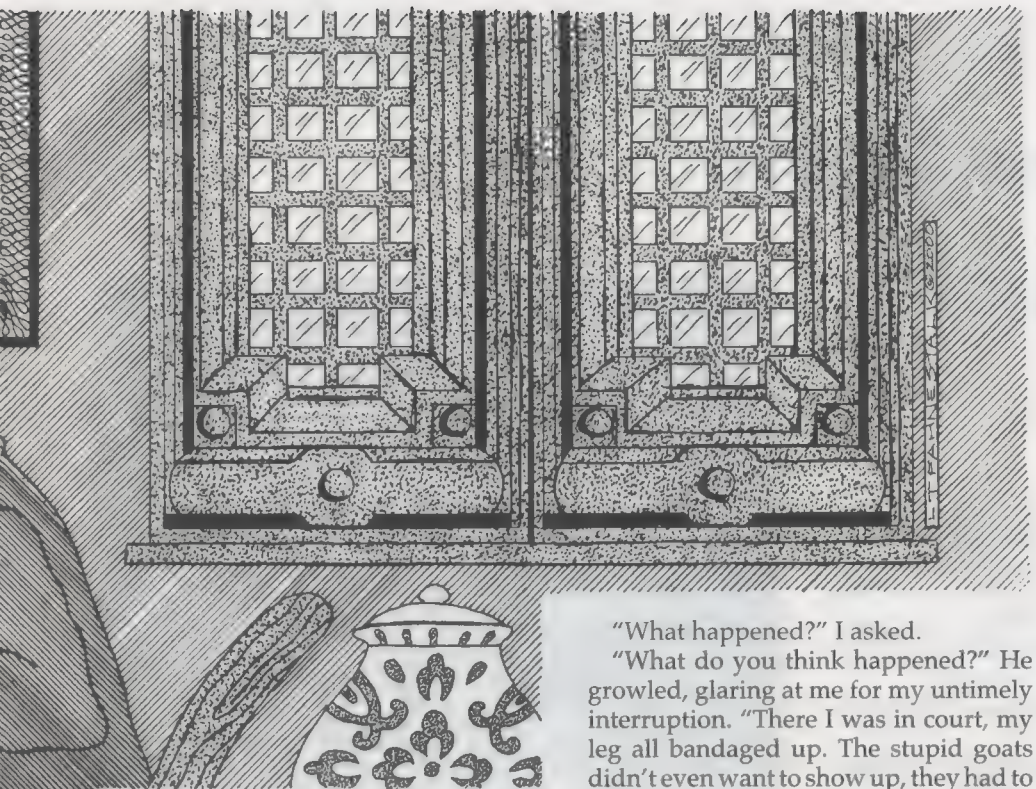
With a wave of his hand, the large troll motioned me toward an oversized sofa. He sat opposite me in a giant chair near the fire and propped his right leg up on a small foot stool.

"What paper did you say you were with?" he asked.

"The Villager's Voice," I replied.

"Oh, yes," he said, tapping his forefinger on a pile of newspapers and magazines next to the chair. "I've read it. Don't get around much anymore, and reading is one of the few pleasures a troll my age

Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk



has left." He paused and looked at me. "I suppose you want to know about that business with the goats. That's all everyone seems to want to ask me about."

"Well, yes," I said, struggling to get comfortable in the sofa. It was so big that my feet barely touched the floor. "It's been quite a long time and we thought a follow-up article would be in order."

"Yes, and that's one of the reasons I agreed to this interview," he said, gruffly. "Everyone always gets the facts screwed up, and I want to set the record straight. You silly reporters told about the main event but you didn't bother to tell the whole story. Those blasted goats were the real villains."

"How do you figure that?" I asked, my pen poised.

"Well," he said, "it was my bridge now, wasn't it?"

"I thought bridges were common property. Belonging to the people, as it were."

"Yeah, well that was their defending argument too." The troll's large, saucer-shaped eyes gleamed.

"Defending argument?"

"Yeah," he chuckled. "I took their little ragged tails to court. I was upset enough about losing the bridge to those bullies, but then when that big one wounded me in the leg I knew I had a case against them. Gave me a limp I still carry with me. When it gets cold, like today, it hurts even worse."

"What happened?" I asked.

"What do you think happened?" He growled, glaring at me for my untimely interruption. "There I was in court, my leg all bandaged up. The stupid goats didn't even want to show up, they had to drag the biggest one in on a leash. Oh, he was all fierce and stamping around with his chest puffed out. Quite a sight."

I started to ask again about the trial, but wisely kept silent. He would tell the story in his own way, I knew.

"Well, the case went on and on. They called witness after witness. They all said how I was mean to them and such nonsense, and wouldn't let them cross the bridge. The silly animals even proclaimed that they were some kind of heroes for clearing me out from under the bridge. Imagine that!"

This time I couldn't help myself. "What happened?"

He glared at me again, but then a crooked smile appeared near the corner of his mouth.

"Why, I won. That's what happened."

"How?"

"I knew something that they didn't, that's how. You see, I'd been living under that bridge for more than twenty years."

"Twenty years?" I asked, incredulously.

"Well, my finances were in a somewhat less tangible state than they are today." He caught my look and quickly explained. "It was much harder for trolls to get decent employment in those days, you see. About the only good jobs to be found were when parents would hire you to scare their kids silly. You know, so the little brats would behave themselves. That could be pretty lucrative, depending on the parents. But then some guy wrote this book about how you shouldn't scare kids to get them to behave, and work fell off again. Anyway, like I was saying, I'd lived under the bridge for more than twenty years, and the village law at that time stated that if a person lived in a place for at least ten years, then that place became their legal home."

"Really?" I said. "I had no idea."

"Neither did those goats, but they learned soon enough. The court ruled in my favor. I was just defending my home." He chuckled and waved his hand around. "I got it all."

"You mean the goats owned this house?"

"Of course not," he replied. "But the farmer that owned them did. The court held him responsible for the actions of his animals. I got everything."

I contemplated the old troll's story as I collected my coat and hat and bid good-day to my host. As I trudged down the winding drive away from the house, I couldn't help wondering how much of what he had told me was true. It was understandable that he would have his own perspective, but it certainly wasn't the story I had expected when I first asked for the interview.

The weather was turning bitter again and a chilly breeze had sprung up from the east. I tugged the collar of my coat tighter against my neck and walked briskly on. My feet crunched in the lightly packed snow as I came to the road and the edge of the troll's property. I glanced over the fence toward the barn and stopped suddenly in my tracks.

Standing near the corner of the barn, chained to a heavy post, was the largest goat I have ever seen in my life. The animal was easily the size of a small horse. Its long shaggy coat brushed the snow beneath as it paced back and forth on its chain. The goat stopped moving when it saw me and shot me a glance so fierce that I had to avert my eyes.

I remembered what the old troll had said to me during the interview. "I got everything," he had told me, and I must say that I am now rather inclined to believe him.

❄

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Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk lives in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada.

Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

An Interview With Terry Pratchett

by Steven Piziks

Terry Pratchett, an Englishman who bears a passing resemblance to Sean Connery, has written over twenty books in the wildly popular Discworld series as well as several young adult novels and a bit of science fiction. This interview was conducted at Chicon 2000, the 58th annual WorldCon in Chicago, a day after dinner in a sushi restaurant.

MZBFM: Yesterday you said you're a ten-year sushi fan. What drew you into it?

Terry Pratchett: When Neil Gaiman and I were writing **GOOD OMENS**, I came up with the name 'wasabi' as a make of Japanese motor car. I later realized I'd come across the term 'wasabi' but didn't know what it meant. Eventually I did find out what it means — it's the Japanese horseradish. I tried some, and it was magnificent. Unfortunately, in order to eat lots of wasabi, you have to have lots of raw fish as well. So I got interested in eating sushi.

In my last American tour, Neil Gaiman and I went out to an all-night sushi restaurant in Seattle, and eventually the guy behind the counter cut up an entire yellowfin and pushed it across to us so he could go home!

In many ways, you're the English version of Stephen King, complete with a little Discworld empire. Over there people have done plays, radio shows, animated adaptations, and even a role-playing game.

There's not as much as you think. It *is* largely a book-based thing, and everything said these days has to be said in the shadow of J.K. Rowling, who is just so big that I've just kind of disappeared from view, if you see what I mean.

It's still very largely fan-based, even the people making the models and the prints and things. It's more like fans making money rather than big industry making money.

How did it get started? I can't think of any equivalent on this side of the ocean.

It's because I'm a nice guy. [laughs] When someone wrote to me saying, "Can my amateur dramatic club do a play based on one of your books?" I said, "Sure."

The reason that it doesn't happen so much in America is that I usually want to write a letter saying, "Sure, you can do it. Pay a hundred dollars to the Orangutan Foundation or something in exchange." Americans don't like that. They want a contract, probably authorized by a notary public in the state of Maryland. For some reason it's always in the state of Maryland. They get very nervous that if they haven't got a proper contract, I'm going to sue them later on.

Now if I write a letter saying, "Thank you for writing. Yes, you can do a play of **WYRD SISTERS**. I don't want any reimbursement, but a charitable check to the Orangutan Foundation for a hundred dollars would be very nice," I take the view that I've given them permission to do it. Why do I have to sign a sodding contract and have it notarized and everything? An Englishmen's word is his bond. And now I've just given the definition of "Englishman".

Why the Orangutan Foundation?

Because when Discworld started to become very popular, I was asked to go and talk to lots of schools and festivals and things like that, and they wanted to pay me money. I thought it was a good idea that they did pay me money, but I didn't *need* their money, if you see what I mean. So I heard about the Orangutan Foundation, which struck me as a very appropriate recipient for it all, what with the Librarian being an orangutan. I phoned up the lady and I said, "I appear to be getting all this money. Would you like some of it?" And she said, "Yeeees."

Since then, I've become a trustee of the British branch of the Foundation. They've apparently got quite a lot of money channeled towards them as a result of my writing. I've given them all the amateur dramatic rights for most of the books, for example.

Stephen Briggs, who actually wrote the **WYRD SISTERS** play, administers it all on behalf of the Orangutan Foundation because we found that we were saying to people, "Yes, you can do it. Please make a charitable donation," and many of them didn't. So now we say, "There *will* be a sum of so much, and you must pay it, and it will go to the Orangutan Foundation, and unless you do this, it cannot happen."

Photo supplied by publisher; photographer unknown

They're really making thousands of pounds a year.

Getting back to what you said earlier, though — over the last two years, Discworld has really started to take off because of certain rethinking on behalf of HarperCollins. **THE FIFTH ELEPHANT**, for instance, doubled the sales of **CARPE JUGULUM**. It's also because HarperCollins started to bring back the earlier books which were out of print.

Actually they were "indefinitely out of stock", according to Roc Books. "Indefinitely out of stock" means "we don't have to revert the rights." Once we forced them to give us the rights back, we sold them to HarperCollins. They're bringing them back as cheap editions, and they are selling incredibly well, which was puzzling — we thought they would never really take off. I mean, so many people are importing English editions anyway. There's a *huge* black market for them.

Thanks to places like Amazon.com UK?

Yeah.

In England, you're marketed as a mainstream author. But over here, you're only marketed as fantasy. Outside the fantasy/science fiction community, nobody knows who you are.

Well, you have a bigger country! It would be true to say that in England I'm big. I'm not as big as Stephen King. Stephen King is huge. Stephen King is recognized as a horror author, but he's also become mainstream by sheer force of numbers. I think in the UK that's the same with me. But there's always the taint of the genre about any genre author.

Yeah, I'm a fantasy writer, and I *call* myself a fantasy writer, which is a *bad* career move. But when your books hit number one every time, you have to factor that in to how they're marketed.

You borrowed the concept of the Disc from Hindu mythology, didn't you?

Well, the look of the Discworld comes to its fullest flowering, shall we say, in Hindu mythology, but there are aspects of it in other mythologies. Certainly the idea of the world being supported on the back of a turtle can be found on all continents, somewhere.

When you came across the concept, were you looking for an idea or did you find it by accident?

I'd known about it for a long time, ever since I was a kid and saw an illustration of it in a book on astronomy. I just remembered it when I wanted to create a totally ridiculous world, and that was it.

You wrote **STRATA** *first, though.*

Yep.

Which was science fiction.

It wasn't a Discworld book. It was a science fiction take on the same idea.

Paul Kidby illustrates a lot of your work.

Now you have to be careful here. Josh *Kir*by does the covers in England, and there's Paul *Kid*by. He does practically everything else. He did the illustrations in the **GURPS DISCWORLD** role-playing game book and in **NANNY OGG'S COOKBOOK**. He's done some posters and some prints. Basically Josh Kirby does the book covers, but Paul Kidby is what you might call the lead spin-off guy. And in fact next year Paul and I are working on a big illustrated book.

What's it like?

It's like — well, if I say the word "Dinotopia", it's not because we're doing the Discworld as a Dinotopia, but we do use the idea that the illustrations are a part of the book, that they are integral to the book. We're doing that for the fall of 2001, and Paul Kidby is very heavily involved in that. It's just unfortunate that these two artists — Kidby and Kirby — have very nearly the same name.

We don't get Paul Kidby's illustrations over here much. Why is that?

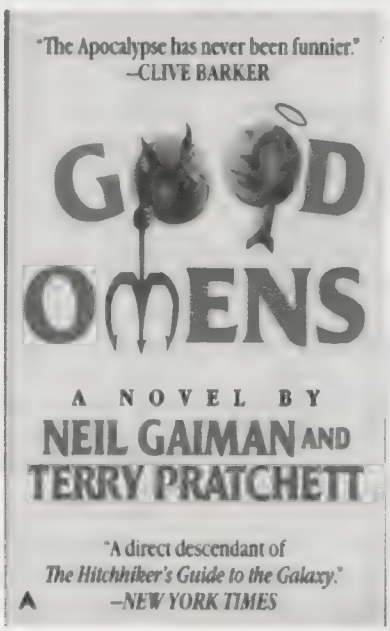
I would say that over the years American publishers have made lots of bad decisions about Discworld.

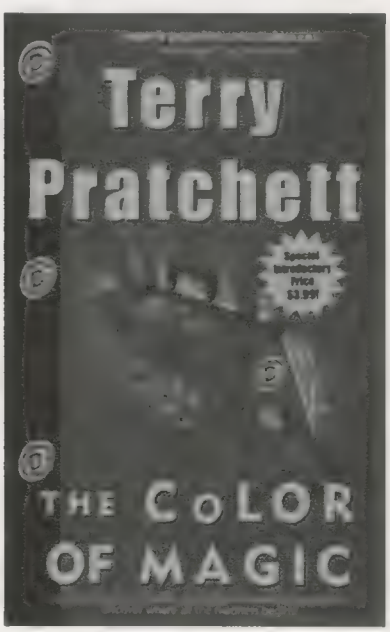
What about books like ***NANNY OGG'S COOKBOOK****? You can't get that in bookstores over here.*

No?

And the same goes for the Discworld maps. You can find them in obscure bookstores, but I think they're importing them from the UK. Very little of this spin-off stuff has found its way across the ocean. Any idea why or comments on that?

I think it's partly because of the fact that spin-offs are a risk. Transworld — my publisher in the UK — did sort of





think twice about **NANNY OGG'S COOKBOOK**. They wondered if it could work. Finally they said, "Yeah, the hell with making thousands. Let's just do it."

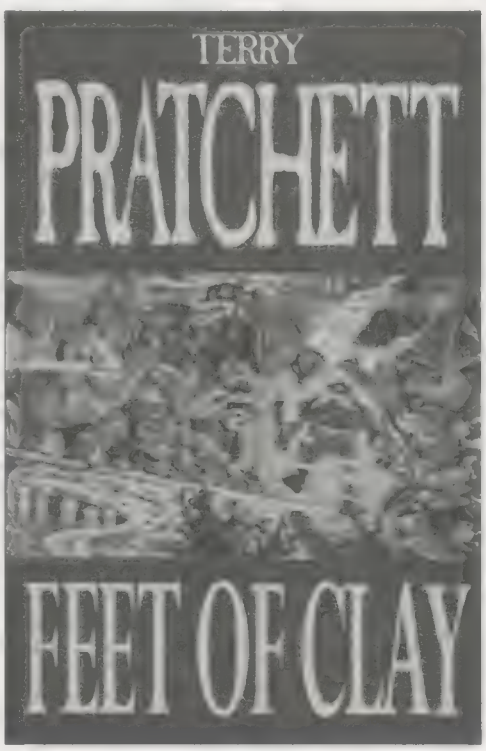
It sold more than enough to prove that they made a good decision, and it's a nice-looking thing. I have to say spin-offs are always slightly risky. After all, no one thought that the first Discworld map, the map of Ankh-Morpork, would so sell so many it would get into the top ten non-fiction bestsellers in the UK!

Non-fiction!?

[laughs] The argument goes that even though it's a map of a fictional place, it *is* a *real map.*

So sometimes spin-offs for something very popular will work and sometimes they don't. No one knows why.

As to why they don't have the spin-off material over here, well, we'll have to see. Maybe that will change I have a new editor and a new publicist now. More importantly, I think, there was a new determination at the top of HarperCollins. They suddenly thought, "Hell! This guy's been making number one, and with all these matching sales in the UK and around the world. Why the hell aren't we doing something here? Maybe we should *read* these books!"



But the fact is now that are people no longer restricted by their countries as to what books they can buy. So the whole thing may become quite academic. More and more people are getting used to ordering their books off the Internet. Meanwhile, I make a hell of a lot of money. The fact that I might be able to make a bit more over the spin-off material doesn't worry me very much.

Must be nice to be in that kind of position!

Yep!

A BBC reporter once asked you which eight CDs you'd take with you to a desert island.

Album tracks, yeah.

What was your answer?

It's hard to remember now. When you're first asked, you think, "Hang on — I'm going to listen to these for the rest of my life!" So you try to choose some kind of balanced diet. I wanted to take some Mozart, some Steeleye Span, a comedy record that not even the BBC had heard of, though they found it for me. There was an Icehouse album — the Australian group Icehouse. There was also a particular recording of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons.*

What eight books *would you take? Besides* ***TEN EASY WAYS TO GET RESCUED FROM A DESERT ISLAND****, that is?*

[laughs] You're ahead of me! I would say **PRACTICAL BOAT BUILDING** and **POISONOUS FISH OF THE SOUTH SEAS**.

Actually I would take eight books of blank paper and a large supply of pencils.

How did you start collaborating with Neil Gaiman?

Okay, picture the scene. I was in my thirties. A spotty, sort-of older young man gets phoned up by an equally sort-of spotty, older young man to be interviewed for a small science fiction semi-prozine. It was Neil Gaiman interviewing me on the release of **THE COLOUR OF MAGIC** in paperback. And we got on fine!

We stayed in contact, and in the late 80s, Neil sent me half a short story. A year later, I phoned him and said, "Did you ever finish that piece?" He said, "No. I don't know what happens next."

I said, "I *do* know what happens next. [general laughter] Here's the deal — I'll buy it off you or we can work together on it as a joint book." And the best decision we ever made was the latter.

The basic idea behind the book is that the Anti-Christ is born but there's a mixup by an angel and a demon, so he's brought up by the wrong people. After that, we reworked things so much that vast amounts of **GOOD OMENS** were written by a conglomerate Terry and Neil. I did seventy percent of the actual typing because someone has to be the editor. But sooner or later what we say is this — two guys had a lot of fun writing a book, they shared the money 50-50, they were very happy, they went away, and they're never, ever going to do it again!

In 1998, you were awarded the Order of the British Empire for services to Literature — capital L. Tell us about that.

Oh yes. And the year after I got an honorary doctorate from Warwick University. I don't know why. I've never been to university. I was probably the only author they could think of at that time who wasn't divorcing his wife or writing obscene literature or drunk: "We have to find an author. Who's halfway acceptable at the moment?" [sniffs] "Well, there's that Pratchett guy. A bit of all right, you know. I've never read him myself, but..."

And I had been working very hard for a lot of years and I'd given a lot of money to charities. And that was it. I went off to Buckingham Palace. The Prince of Wales shook my hand and said, "Wa haw wa haw haw ha haw," and I said, "Wa? Haw wa haw haw haw."

It was great fun. It doesn't *mean* anything, though. It won't get you a seat on the bus, or anything like that.

Well, you got to shake the hand of the Prince of Wales. [pause] *On the other hand, so do a lot of people.*

[laughs] Yeah. It *was* nice. People say, "You're not a monarchist, so why did you do it?" I did it for two reasons. One, because it annoyed a lot of people, which is a good reason. And the other one is a better reason — it made my mum proud. And that's a really good reason. My old mum — it made her proud.

Did any characters in the Discworld books start off as spear-carriers or background people and then sort of take on a life of their own?

That's a kind of evolving process. Some take off, some don't. Some start small, some get bigger. Some get killed in the same book. I never know when I start out.

Has that happened to any of the existing characters? Someone

who started out small in one of the earlier books and turned into a main character later?

Certainly! I don't want to get too geeky and go into fine details about the books, but originally Captain Vimes in **GUARDS! GUARDS!** was going to be a secondary character. He turned out to be, I think, one of the two most interesting characters in the Discworld series. Just how they will evolve, though, is something I never know at first.

Which Discworld characters in your estimation seem to be the most popular among the readers?

Death. Rincewind and the Luggage. Granny Weatherwax and Commander Vimes.

*When I read **LORDS AND LADIES**, I thought for sure you were going to kill off Granny Weatherwax. She had appeared in four or five books, and I wondered if you were going to pull off something like Arthur Conan Doyle did with Sherlock Holmes because you'd gotten tired of her or didn't have anything more to say with her. But you didn't kill her off. Is there anybody that you* did *come close to killing off but then didn't at the last minute?*

Gaspode the Wonder Dog. He was originally going to be killed off in **MOVING PICTURES**, but both my editors went down on bended knees and said, "Please!" They didn't want the little dog to die! I had to use a little movie magic to save him, but it was appropriate for the book! And it turned out for the best because he's become a good background character in the series now. In fact, in **THE TRUTH** — have you read ***The Truth*** yet?

What is it?

It's the next Discworld novel.

I haven't seen it yet.

Oh wait — you couldn't have read it. It's not coming out for another two months.

We'll be watching for it!

At any rate, there's an unpleasant character in the book, a villain called Mr. Tulip. He dies — or at least he died in the first draft. But my editor said, "He's such a wonderful character! You cannot let him die!"

I said, "He's the bad guy!" But they continued to plead with me. So I came up with an...arrangement. He sort of dies, but it's not as clear cut as that.

You do a lot of research for your books. Tell us about some of that.

There's no better warmth than the warmth of a cow. I found this in a book about life in the nineteenth century. If someone is sick, you put them in a cow byre. There's just something healing about the warmth that a cow gives off. You find all sorts of odd things.

There are two types of research. In the book I'm writing right now, I need to know something about the making of chocolate. It would probably be good that I know you make it out of cocoa butter, cream, vanilla, and all that. So there's that kind of research, where you're looking for specific facts.

The other kind of research is like the recipe for what I think was called "Lark Surprise."

Lark Surprise?

You take a single olive, and you stuff it into a robin. You stuff the robin into a skylark, stuff the skylark in a quail, stuff the quail into a capon, stuff the capon into a swan, and stuff the swan into a goose. You cook it. When it's done properly, you take it out. You throw away the goose, you throw away the swan, you throw away the capon, you throw away the quail, the skylark, and the robin.

And you eat the olive.

By that point, the olive is so perfectly flavored, that it's all you want. That's the second kind of research. You come across a lot of interesting things that you just toss out — or file away for later — and you keep the one bit you really need.

People ask me how long it takes to write a book. I say, "Oh, about six months — and being alive for fifty-two years."

You're always researching. As writers doing research, we watch people. Sometimes people say things to me like [falsetto voice] "Oooo! You're a writer! I'll have to watch what I say or you'll be writing it down."

And we do.

We look at the silly way you laugh, the way you interrupt one another, the way you move. It all gets written down.

The worst *faux pas* I, or rather myself, Jack Cohen, and Ian Stewart, ever made was when we each assumed the other knew the exact date of the Apollo moon landing.

Uh oh.

Then the mistake was assuming the editor would spot it, then assuming the copy editor would spot it, and then, after it was about to come out in hardcover, assuming that the careful letter we sent with the right date on it would actually be translated into a change in the text. Sometimes when things go wrong, they carry *on* going wrong.

You have to develop the smash and grab approach to research. If you don't, you become a kind of research fanatic. It's terrible, actually. For example, I'm at last in that very rare state of having slightly more bookshelves than I have books.

Wow!

It's a temporary phenomenon. Eventually I'll come across a bunch of boxes in the attic. All my books are currently in one place, though, and I've now got a library ladder. I've always wanted one!

At any rate, when you've got all these books and they're in one place, you sometimes get into a kind of research fugue, lost in the sheer fun of research. That happened to me fairly recently. I came across a text of the Bible that gave the size of heaven as twelve thousand furlongs on a side, so I called up my friend Ian Stewart, a professor of mathematics, and said, "Okay, Ian. Let's say two-thirds of heaven is taken up by gospels of angels. How many humans beings can we get in there comfortably?"

We spent the whole afternoon on it. Nothing came of it, but it was great fun! I need to tell you — anyone who has even been remotely human has a place in heaven, so probably cats go there, too. And you'd get a pretty good suite in the whole gig.

This was purely undirected research.

This is why you develop the smash-and-grab approach. Generally I dive in there knowing what I want, like what kind of clock was made in a certain time in a certain place, and as soon as I've got it, I get out of there quick!

I was researching martial arts once and came across some of the wilder claims about ninjas. I got to thinking. Okay — so you have this guy who moves like the night. He can walk across the ceiling. He can practically fly. He has all these devices. You don't know he's there.

He just has really gassy digestion. [general laughter]

One day, possibly, I'll use that in a book. But I don't think the world is quite yet ready.

I once got a letter from a girl who wrote to me, "Dear Mr. Pratchett, we very much enjoyed your book, but my mother and I didn't know the meaning of the word 'priapic'. [more general laughter] My mom thought it meant 'curly hair'. So we looked it up in the dictionary and — hey! — we found out that it *didn't* mean 'curly hair'. Wow! We found out what it *did* mean."

I've gone high-tech. I keep notes to myself on a Palm Pilot, bits of things that I write down as they occur to me. Like this. [taking out Palm Pilot and reading] "If you performed an experiment in chaos theory and it didn't work, it would prove chaos theory."

"Find out the Latin for 'We who are about to die don't want to die.'"

Something I overheard: "Do you have a character flaw?" "No, I can't think of one."

Something else I overheard: "Do you like onions?" "I don't know. Do I like onions, dear?" "No, dear, they give you wind." "No, I don't like onions."

"Cats and curry."

I don't know why I've written down "cats and curry." There is nothing worse than the idea you know you had and you've now forgotten. You say to yourself, "It was a sodding great idea," and now it's gone.

I know Death likes cats and curry — but not at the same time.

You said a dangerous thing in a WorldCon panel. You said you couldn't get through any of the late Patrick O'Brien's books. I couldn't either, incidentally. What is it about them that didn't quite grab you?

The extensive research, which as far as I'm aware is one hundred percent accurate, just got in the way. For want of a better word and picking my words carefully, I think it was too...*exquisite.*

Now I like historical fiction. I like Hornblower. I like Sharpe. And they put in all the right period flavor, but they also work as books, as *stories.*

I appreciate that the flaw is probably within me, because I realize how popular Patrick O'Brien is. It may well be that if I stuck with it, it would work for me. The detail just gets in the way, though. I was thinking, "Sure I'm impressed. You know tons and tons of stuff, but can we get on with the story please?"

Are you still a role-playing gamer?

No, no. People would gang up on me because I'm Terry Pratchett.

Which out of the Lancre witches would you want — or not want — living in your neighborhood or next door?

Well, the two younger witches — Agnes and Magrat — they would be okay. Nanny Ogg wouldn't be because her parties would keep me awake all the time. Granny would probably be okay as well, except I can never imagine Granny Weatherwax as living next door to anyone. If ever there was a cottage-in-the-woods witch, it's her.

How are the carnivorous plants doing?

Oh god — I wish I had never mentioned them! [sighs] They're doing very fine, and they're very boring.

Did you plan on the Discworld books becoming a long-running series?

When I wrote the first Discworld book, I didn't know there was going to be a second. When I wrote the second, I didn't know there was going to be a third. When I wrote the third, I thought there *might* be a fourth. Now I generally know that there are going to be two more Discworld stories at any one time. But I don't intend to do it for the rest of my life.

What do you want to do besides Discworld?

[long pause] I don't know. [laughs] I've got a couple of plots — or rather, more than plots. They're shells awaiting the day I get tired of writing Discworld. I have not yet got tired of writing Discworld, though. I like it. The fans like it. The publishers like it.

What are your writing habits?

I take the view that during every waking moment, I'm writing in some way. It took me a long time to realize I can be writing even when I'm not at the keyboard because a part of me stays being a writer all the time.

If I'm in my office at my keyboard, my full attention is on writing the next book, but eventually I have to break off. I have to do the mail, for example, which is very big. But when I'm at my computer, I just make sure my full attention is on writing, and that keeps the words going.

I'm, shall we say, *undisciplined* in small details but highly disciplined overall. The book *will* be finished by the deadline, but some days I may not do much work.

What Discworld book are you working on now?

I've nearly finished **THIEF OF TIME**, which is a Discworld book for simultaneous UK and US publication next May.

There *is* a story arc in Discworld. But I don't quite know how some things are going to resolve. But I think there will be some fairly major things happening in the next few years. Some stories advance the story arc, some don't.

You explore a lot of fantasy motifs in the Discworld books and you parody various things in the Discworld books. Are you ever planning on doing a sacred king motif?

What do you mean by "sacred king"? The guy who's king for twelve days and you chop his head off to make the fields fertile?

The person who is appointed by the gods to be the king and he will be king no matter what.

Knowing what I do about the gods, I don't trust their judgement in the matter of kings! Every fiber in my being is revolted by the idea. For centuries kings more or less oppressed the European people, and at the bottom of it was their claim that the kingship derived from god. I'm an atheist, but it wouldn't matter if I wasn't.

I would rather paraphrase the words of Monty Python: "You became king because some moistened bint threw a sword at you out of the lake? Ridiculous!" That's what I like about the work of Lord Victor Marley. He doesn't pretend the gods have put him there.

Are there any final words of wisdom you want to add?

[long pause] Nope. [general laughter]

Thank you, Terry Pratchett. ❄

TERRY PRATCHETT BIBLIOGRAPHY

NON-DISCWORLD BOOKS

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THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN
STRATA
TRUCKERS
DIGGERS
WINGS
ONLY YOU CAN SAVE MANKIND
JOHNNY AND THE DEAD
JOHNNY AND THE BOMB
THE UNADULTERATED CAT (with Gray Jolliffe)
GOOD OMENS (with Neil Gaiman)
THE DISCWORLD COMPANION (with Stephen Briggs)
THE PRATCHETT PORTFOLIO (with Paul Kidby)

THE DISCWORLD SERIES

THE COLOUR OF MAGIC
THE LIGHT FANTASTIC
EQUAL RITES
MORT
GUARDS! GUARDS!
ERIC (with Josh Kirby)
MOVING PICTURES
REAPER MAN
WITCHES ABROAD
SMALL GODS
LORDS AND LADIES
MEN AT ARMS
SOUL MUSIC
INTERESTING TIMES
MASKERADE
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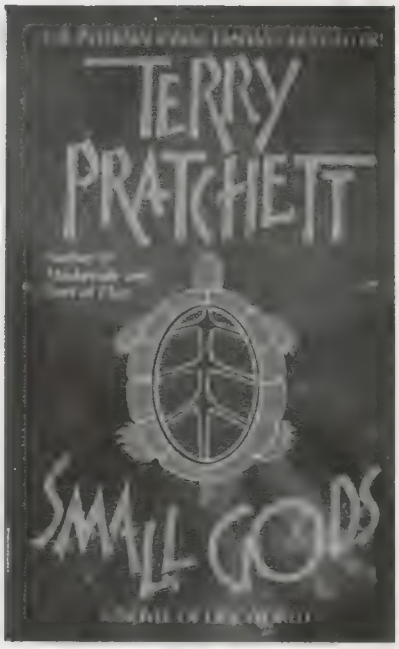

HOGFATHER
JINGO
THE LAST CONTINENT
CARPE JUGULUM
THE FIFTH ELEPHANT
THE TRUTH

DISCWORLD ADAPTATIONS

THE COLOUR OF MAGIC (Graphic Novel)
THE LIGHT FANTASTIC (Graphic Novel)
MORT: A DISCWORLD COMIC BOOK (with Graham Higgins)
SOUL MUSIC: THE ILLUSTRATED SCREENPLAY
WYRD SISTERS: THE ILLUSTRATED SCREENPLAY
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❄

Background: Getting it Right

by Raul S. Reyes

Background is a major factor in a story for any writer. It's also one of the most difficult to handle. Ideally it should be transparent to the reader and not get in the way of the story. On the other hand it sets time and place for the story, and often determines what sort of story you have. By just changing the background, names, and weapons, a fantasy story becomes a Western, a murder mystery set in New York's lower east side becomes a science fiction mystery on the moon, and a military science fiction story becomes a Tom Clancy rip-off of the sort you can find in any airport bookstore.

A major part of the writer's task is finding good source material for background. This is especially important for writers of fantasy and science-fiction. The science and history sections of the library are traditional and well-used areas of research. Every writer worth his salt is familiar with the *Reader's Guide To Periodical Literature* and its internet equivalents. But it's always a good idea to keep an eye out for useful information when it appears in out-of-the-way places.

A case in point is a recent article in a local paper's Sunday Travel Section. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, August 27, 2000). Those of you who read my story **"Raven"** in FM32 may recall my reference to Raven's ship as "double-hulled and Claw-sailed". It was based on a Polynesian catamaran. The lead article in the *Chronicle*'s travel section was about a reconstruction of a Hawaiian double hulled sailing canoe. While the vessel in the story had more of a Northwest look to it (and I highly applaud Alicia Austin's illustrations for that story), it was initially inspired by the South Pacific's long-haul sailing catamarans, in which the early Polynesians undertook epic voyages that can still take our breath away. Look at the area the Pacific Ocean occupies on a globe sometime, and imagine crossing it in a fifty-foot sailing catamaran.

While I had written the story several years before the article came out, I still clipped it out for future use. Did you know that there are eight different patterns of ripples on the Ocean surface that the early Polynesian navigators noted and used? That the taste of the sea water was important in determining what area of the Pacific they were in? These would be small, but important, details in setting the background of any story set in the Old Pacific. And implied in the background of the story would be other matters. How were the navigators trained? How was that knowledge acquired and transmitted? What sort of Guild did all that, and how did it work? And how did people fit into that social and economic matrix? Even if the story is moved to another world, or into deep space, that sort of background element can still add a touch of social setting and characterization that can make a story come alive.

While neophyte fantasy writers may not normally regard magazines like *Scientific American, Natural Science*, or *Discover* as sources, those magazine often carry articles that may be of interest to a fantasy writer seeking to develop background for a story. The November 2000 issue of *Discover* magazine contained an article on the funeral mound of King Midas of Phrygia. Midas was an historical figure of whom little was known aside from a pair of Greek myths. All have heard of the Midas Touch and the curse of the donkey's ears, but little of the man or king was known. Then in 1957 a burial mound in Turkey was opened and the real King Midas stepped out of legend and into the modern world. His tomb contained funeral clothes, furniture, and bronze artifacts. Interestingly there was no gold found at all. Of more importance to a writer were the bronze bowls and goblets found in the tomb, and the residues in them.

For over forty years those residues were in sealed paper bags in the Archeology Department of the University of Pennsylvania. Recent advances in chemical analysis allowed a closer look at those residues. From that analysis chemists determined the makeup of Midas' funeral feast.

It was a meal very much like one we would eat, with some differences. Barbecued sheep or goat was cut up and put into a lentil stew with olive oil, anise, honey, wine, and assorted spices. The stew was washed down with a heady punch of beer, mead, and wine. Mixed drinks are nothing new, and Midas' bartender most likely served him well. If a story set in the late bronze age or the early Classical age includes a feast at some noble table, that meal would most likely be similar to King Midas' last meal.

An article in the August 2000 issue of *Scientific American* touches on a related topic. The menus of the well-to-do prior to the 15th century varied little from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. The common people ate whatever they could, usually vegetable soups and gruels, and bread and porridge. Meat was a luxury, and beer and wine were reserved for feast days.

But for the wealthy cost was no object, and their diets prior to the 1600s were remarkably similar throughout the West and the Islamic cultures as far East as India. Obviously their thoughts on food shared a common origin, in this case the

thoughts of the Greek and Roman philosophers.

The Greek Hippocrates and the Roman Galen formulated Classical thinking about nutrition. When Classical civilization ended in the West, Islamic scholars took up the task of preserving and interpreting these ideas for their wealthy patrons.

Simply, cooks and physicians believed that the body contained four fluids, or humors: blood, phlegm, and yellow and black bile. These four fluids were thought to correspond to the four elements listed by Aristotle: fire, air, water, and earth. These in turn corresponded with the four properties of matter: hot, dry, cold, and wet. Foods were also thought to correspond to these four categories, and therefore a properly balanced diet would include all four elements and properties in a proper proportion. The proportion would vary from the ideal if the diner was elderly or ill. Geography and season also had to be accounted for, with "hot" foods being served in the winter or in northern climes, and "cool" foods served in summer, or in more southern regions. In addition the method of cooking was important. "Dry" foods were boiled, moist and warm foods were fried or roasted. There were exceptions of course. In the cold northern regions, meat was more often boiled rather than roasted.

Consequently a meal on the table of a wealthy or noble house in the Middle Ages would be strange to modern tastes. Suckling pig, naturally warm and moist, would be roasted over a hot, dry fire. Bread and blancmange would be served with it. Blancmange was a puree of shredded cooked chicken breasts, rice flour, almond milk, sugar, and pork fat. Cameline sauce would be a side dish. That was made with skinned and ground almonds, bread crumbs, raisins, cloves and cinnamon, all moistened with sour grape juice. The drink would have been hypocras. Cinnamon and ginger would be added to a keg of the best red wine, along with a pound of sugar, and the whole concoction steeped for a day, and strained.

This was a balanced meal in the early middle ages. Warm and moist meat, rice, sugar and fruits, and cold red wine were balanced with hot and dry spices. The noble and well-to-do could take their places at table secure in the knowledge that their diets were supported by the latest scientific theories as interpreted by their chefs and physicians. Fad diets are nothing new.

In the late middle ages the theories of Paracelsus took hold, and new categories were used to describe matter, and consequently food. The main categories were sulfur, salt, and mercury. These properties were unrelated to the elements of that name, and shared only perceived properties. Mercury was the volatile, "spirituous" part of food, responsible for flavor and smell. Salt was the solid part of food, and Sulfur was the liquid, or oily part, which bound it all together. Foods containing the oily part of food, such as butter, cream, lard, or olive oil, became the basis of sauces that "bound" the other properties of foods. Greens, which were thought to contain all these properties, became fashionable. Mushrooms, which were from the earth and "salt" were paired with meat. Out of this new perception we get the modern Western diet. A meal eaten by your characters should fit time and place.

The cover story in November 2000 issue of *Natural Science* is titled "The Silent Saga of The Vikings", and details the latest finding regarding the economy of the North men during the Viking Age. I recommend it to anyone writing a story in that time span. The Vikings were more than raiders, their main focus was on trade and settlement. An important part of their trade was stock fish, salted fish which was traded as far away as Poland and northern Italy in return for luxury goods and foodstuffs. And economic decisions made by them doomed their culture to a dead end when the climate turned bad in the early 13th century.

Initially they tried to transplant the ideal of the Northern homestead to new lands in Iceland, Greenland, and Vinland. They were unaware that they had passed a climatic and ecological divide. The soils in the new lands were thin, poor, and were not renewed quickly. Cattle, sheep, pigs and horses quickly overgrazed the land. The advent of colder weather doomed these already marginal settlements.

At home Viking traders selling stock fish abroad needed a commercial style fishery at home to supply them. Fishing villages quickly developed that caught and dried fish for trade. These villages had only a minor economic base at home. Often they were built on marginal land that was not easily supplied by local farmsteads, and were dependent on imported foodstuffs from distant markets. That trade passed through middlemen, and the villages went into debt. When the climate went into a cool-down in the early 13th century, prices for food increased, and the village economies collapsed. Young men left on Viking raids out of need as much as for adventure.

Early Polynesian navigators noted and used eight different patterns of ripples on the ocean surface.

One avenue for young men seeking adventure and gold was Byzantium, called Miklagaard, or the "big town" by Scandinavians. The Emperor needed fighting men, and the Vikings found a ready marketš for their sword skills. These became the famed Varangian Guard, which for centuries guarded the Emperor at home and led his forces in the field.

Climate is a very important part of the background for a story. Along with geography, it affects what people eat, what they wear, what their houses and furniture look like, and their outlook on life. Recently there have been quite a few articles on climate and global warming in the scientific literature.

The Science Fact article in the December 2000 issue of *Analog* looks at the last time we had a similar Global Warming. That was the Little Climatic Optimum, or Medieval Warming Period, lasting from about 750 to about 1225 AD. I should note that exact dates and temperatures are controversial, but there is agreement on a warming trend, with an average temperature increase of about 2 to 4 degrees Fahrenheit, and a generally drier and warmer climate.

What most people believe about the Middle Ages is based on the rather bleak and dismal latter part, from about 1225 to 1500. But the weather during the early and middle part was rather benign, compared to what came after, at any rate. A

warmer climate made for longer growing seasons, prosperity, population growth, and an optimistic and innovative outlook on life.

It's likely that the early Renaissance in the south of France at that time, centered around but not limited to Eleanor of Aquitane's court, came about in part due to the mild climate. The troubadour tradition began there. There was a freer style of thinking, led by the Averroist School, with people experimenting with reason and new ideas rather than accepting historical authority. The effect on culture, music, and literature was major- all traceable in part to the change in climate.

The focus of European civilization moved to the northern regions of France and Germany. That move was to be permanent, with far-reaching consequences in trade, industry and technology. The discovery of easily worked coal and iron deposits sparked an early version of the industrial revolution in those lands that set the stage for the more familiar later one. The use of water power spread, with an increase of water mills throughout Europe. Skilled labor became more productive. Iron smiths became more common, and that affected everything from war to agriculture. The use of metal tools increased crop yields. Greater agricultural yields, extended trade — and consequently greater tax revenues — allowed larger armies, and those armies could now be adequately armed. The armored knight came into being.

The warming trend made the North Atlantic and the Baltic navigable for relatively small boats with a low freeboard, such as the Viking longboat. Population growth in the Scandinavian lands sent younger sons out to sea to explore and seek their fortunes in far away lands. Trade with the East grew, as did voyages of exploration West to the New World. And of course, so did piracy. The Viking long boat has been described as the only ocean-going landing craft ever made. But even such well made ships needed a relatively calm ocean due to their low freeboard. Most fantasy stories are placed in the middle ages, but be careful in the setting for your story. Living conditions varied greatly over time and place.

Note that the Viking long boats were made of oak planks, and each plank was made from half a log. Such a wasteful use of timber required large oak forests, and a long-lasting warm climate to grow them.

If you want to set a story much earlier you might try the Holocene era, which roughly bracketed the Bronze age. Again, dates and actual hard data are controversial, but archeological data indicates a relatively pleasant time, with good growing seasons, the spread of agriculture, extensive trade, population growth, relatively good health, and wealthy societies and cultures. The cultural side of life leaves little trace, but we may safely assume that well-fed and healthy people would have had time and inclination to listen to bards and storytellers, and the wealth for art and adornment.

Graves show a great deal more about a culture. Archeology books and journals are good sources here. A fascinating grave in Egtved, Jutland, dating to about 1500 BC, opens a window into life for a well-to-do young woman in the Bronze age. In the grave was an oak coffin made from one large log that had been split and then hollowed out. It contained the remains of a young woman. She was in good health and in her early twenties. Along with the expected bronze, gold, and amber jewelry archeologists found weapons and clothing, as well as the remains of a cremated child of about seven. They are similar to other grave finds from that age.

A short bronze sword and matching bronze buckler both hung from her belt. Bronze and gold armlets and an amber pendant were her ornaments. A bronze comb held her hair in place. Most striking were her short wool jacket and matching miniskirt, and leather shoes. The shoes were the tied-on, calf-length sort similar to Roman sandals. The mid-thigh miniskirt was one long wool cord looped up and down and tied together at the top and bottom. We don't know what the original colors were since the oak tannins had soaked into the coffin, and stained everything organic into a uniform brown. The bronze weapons are a mystery. Were they ceremonial or status symbols, or actual fighting tools that may have seen use? And we can only guess about the child's remains. Was she the young woman's child, who died with her, or was she intended as a sacrifice?

We can infer much from this. The general climate must have been mild, for such an outfit to be worn. Trade was extensive, for the accumulation of wealth to take place. Wealth, adequate food supplies, and the gentle climate may have contributed to the benign social climate that allowed a young woman to be interred with such grave goods. And fashions like that are not worn when the social background is brutish and violent, no matter how well-armed a young woman might be. All this implies a relatively healthy, wealthy, and peaceful time. A story set in that era will be very different from one set a thousand years later.

Another obvious research tool is the internet. Look at sites you might not normally visit. While browsing the net recently I came across a site set up by the Polish tourist board. Links led me to Polish Historical web sites, and a then to a site devoted to the winged Hussars of 17th century Poland. The Winged Hussars, named for the winglike appendages sometimes affixed to their armor, were one of the most fascinating, effective, and unique military organizations in history. Each Hussar was an impressive weapons platform. In addition to four wheel-lock pistols, each carried a pair of swords under his saddle flaps, a European-style broadsword and a curved saber. Each also carried a lance, a mace, a recurve bow, and a quiver of arrows. Their military organization was unique and effective, allowing them to consistently fight off larger forces. They are sadly neglected in most fantasy and historical writing, as is most of Eastern Europe.

There were cultures and kingdoms east of the Danube with long, complex, and fascinating histories that are waiting to be mined by fantasy and history writers.

And don't neglect the cultures of the Far East. Information about them can be found in bookstores in any major city. Most large cities with an Asian population will have bookstores with a wide selection of books not normally found in other, more mainline bookstores. Japanese history, for example, is more varied, complex, and interesting than is commonly known. In addition to the familiar Samurai and ninja, there were the Warrior Monks of the Nara, Enryaku, and Mie-Dera Temples that sat on mountain tops near the ancient capitol of Kyoto. Their warrior skills rivaled those of the early Samurai. And then there were the warrior priests, the Yamabushi, or mountain warriors. Part warrior, part monk, and part mystic, they were one of the roots of the ninja warrior cult.

The cultures of ancient Japan were equally varied. At one

time during the late bronze age Japan was ruled by a Priestess-Queen who lived in a fortified castle and never saw any men except her brother. The Echizo of the Kanto plain were horse nomads who hunted from horseback and had a life similar to the Plains Indian of the West.

China had a variety of warrior classes, from knights and warrior monks to the shadowy warriors called vagabonds, who were the Chinese equivalent of the ninja.

Tibet, until the twelfth century, was a warlike power in Asia with Tibetan armies ranging as far as Tashkent and Samarkand. They even occupied the Chinese capital at one time. Tibet has its own warrior tradition. Most people don't know that the White Crane form of Chinese Kung Fu is actually Tibetan in origin.

And at one time Siam had a Samurai army as a spearhead. Emigration from Japan was a major factor in Asian history, with many Japanese going to settle in Siam. The King of Siam, who knew a good thing when he saw it, allowed them to settle and have their own, semiautonomous kingdom, with its own army. The only condition was that they should join his army when he went to war. Siam at that time was a country on the make, and Siamese conquests went as far as the Mekong Delta and Angkor Wat. I wonder at the possible image of Samurai scaling the temple walls of Angkor Wat when it finally fell to invading Siamese.

One intriguing might-have-been was in a history of the Mongol Khans I read back in High School (**THE MONGOLS**, J. Curtin. 1908). In 1274 the Il-Khan of the Golden Horde sent an envoy to the Pope offering a military alliance against the Moslems. In return the Mongols would convert to Christianity. As he envisioned it, Western armies would advance into the Middle East via the Levant, while Mongol armies would come down from Asia along the shores of the Caspian and Black Seas.

One interesting historical source I've discovered is the Museum Replicas catalogue put out by Atlanta Cutlery (Box 840, Conyers, GA 30012, phone 1-800-883-8838, www.museumreplicas.com). The historical sidebars are well-researched, and in addition to the historical background of the replica swords they sell they sometimes add little known and interesting historical gems. In addition to replica swords and weapons they sell period clothing and books. Especially books. I recommend them to any researcher. I buy a few books a year from them, and they send me catalogues. Well worth the price.

Another good catalogue is that put out by Bugei Trading Company (1070 Commerce St. Ste 1, San Marcos, CA 92069-2626, 1-800-437-0125, www.bugei.com). Their emphasis is mainly Japanese swords and weapons, but their line of books is very good, and includes many titles not normally found elsewhere. The books cover a wide variety of subjects, from military history to art to legends and horror stories. They also sell artwork and Japanese utensils for the tea ceremony and other parts of Japanese life. The smaller catalogue is free, but I recommend shelling out the six dollars for the larger one. Again, well worth the price.

There are many settings for fantasy stories beyond the familiar European middle ages. And even that had many forms, depending on time and place. A bit of research in out of the way bookstores, web sites, and magazines can yield dividends that can be turned into tales very different from the usual. Good luck. ❄

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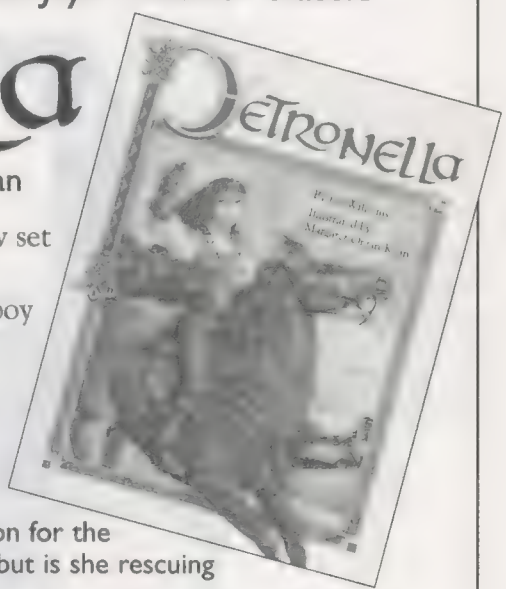

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The pages and covers of Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine have been graced by some very fine artwork. While I couldn't even reach all the artists who've contributed, and couldn't fit in all the artwork that was sent to me, the following pages will remind you of some of the people who helped make our pages fun to look at as well as interesting to read. My special thanks to David Cherry, Janet Kramer, Bob Eggleton, Nick Jainschigg, Vincent Di Fate, and Margaret Organ-Kean, for advice, encouragement, and contact information for other artists. — *Rachel Holmen*

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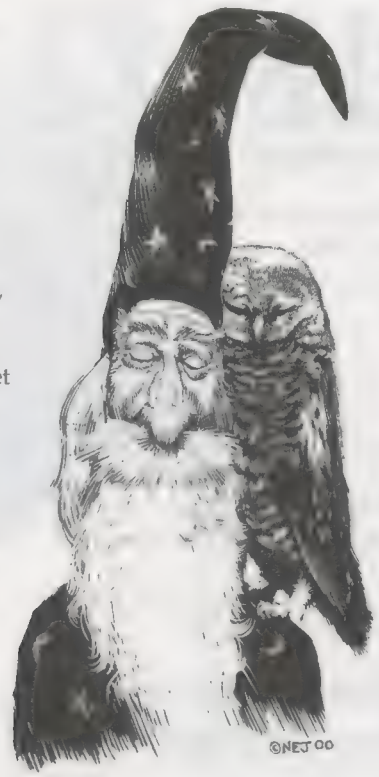

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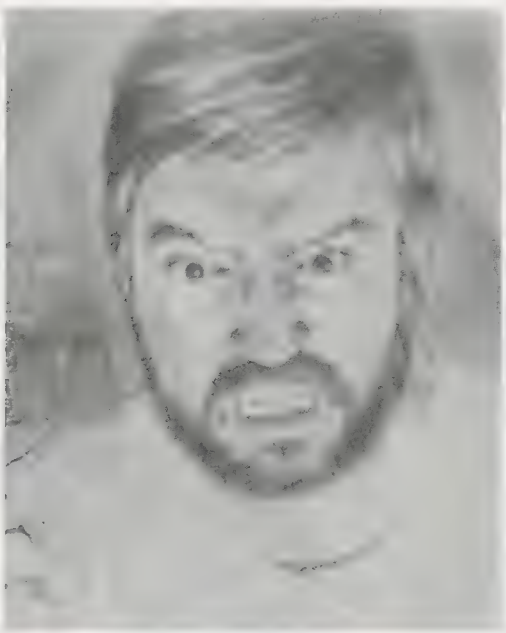

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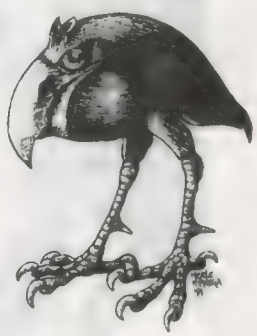

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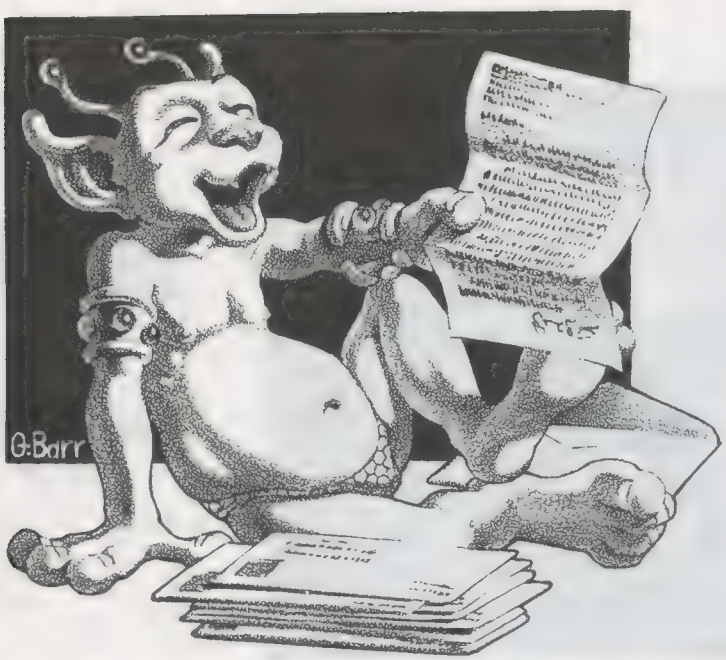

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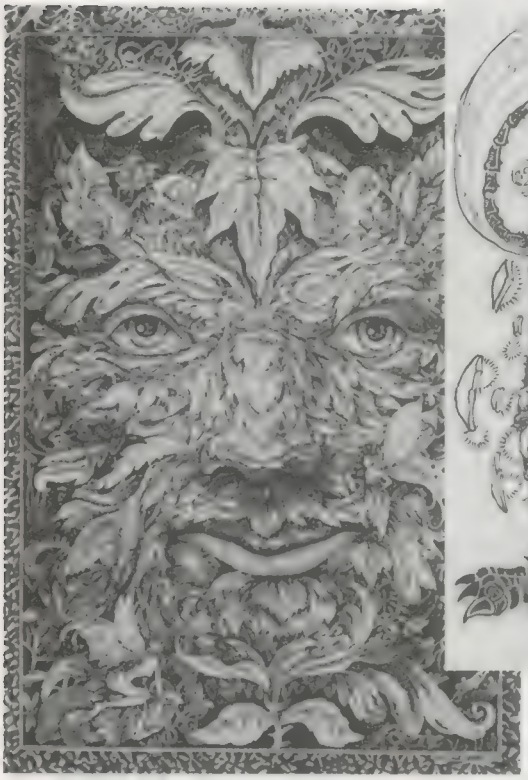

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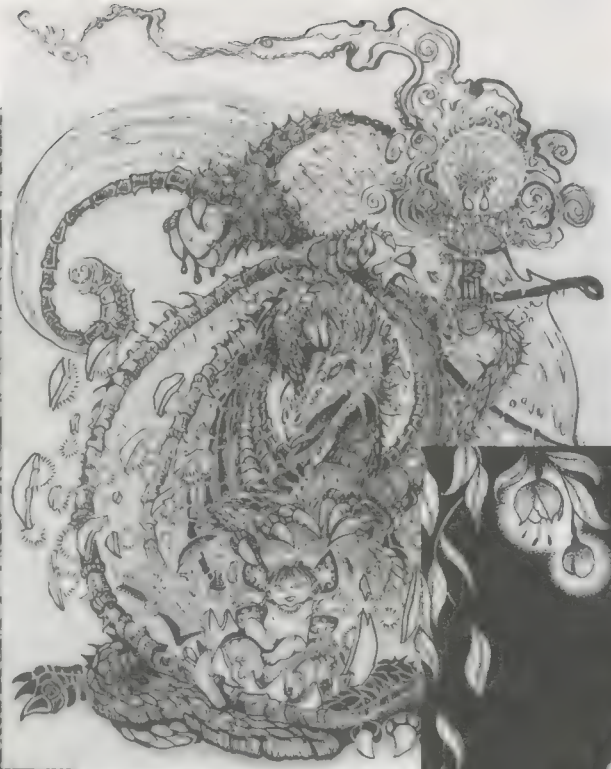

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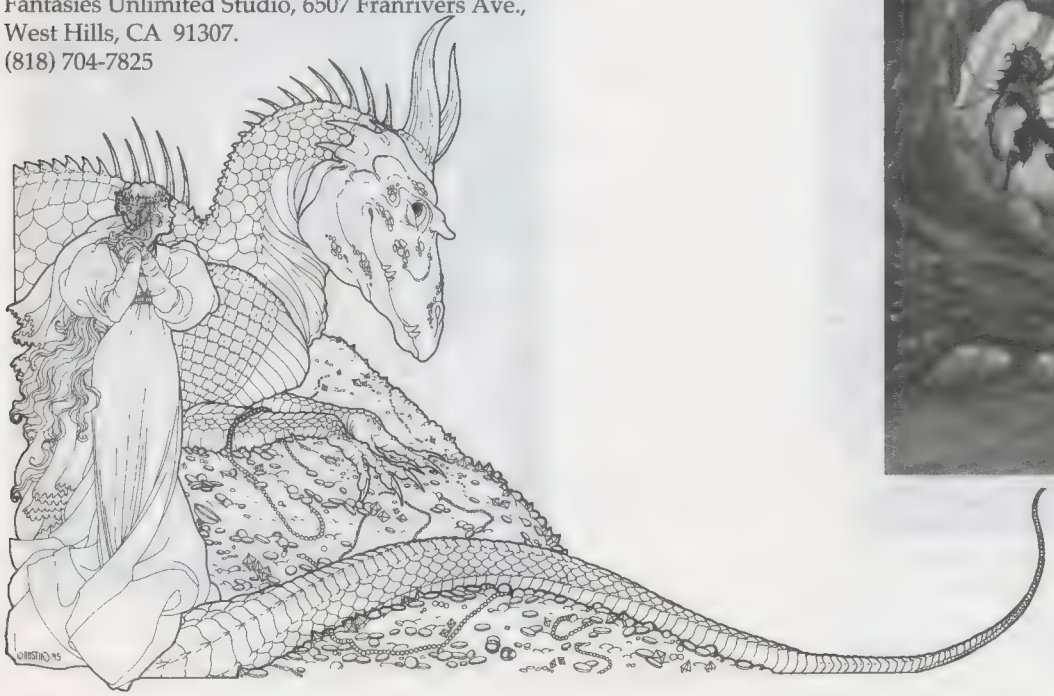

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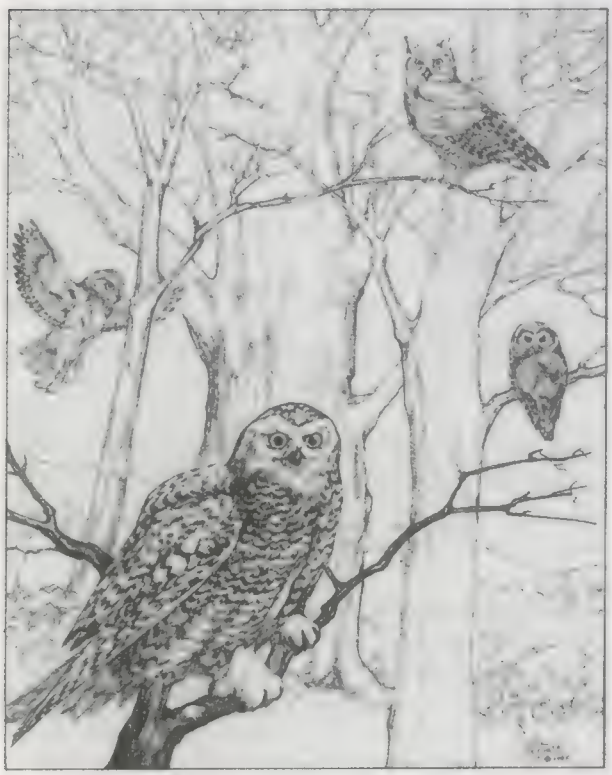

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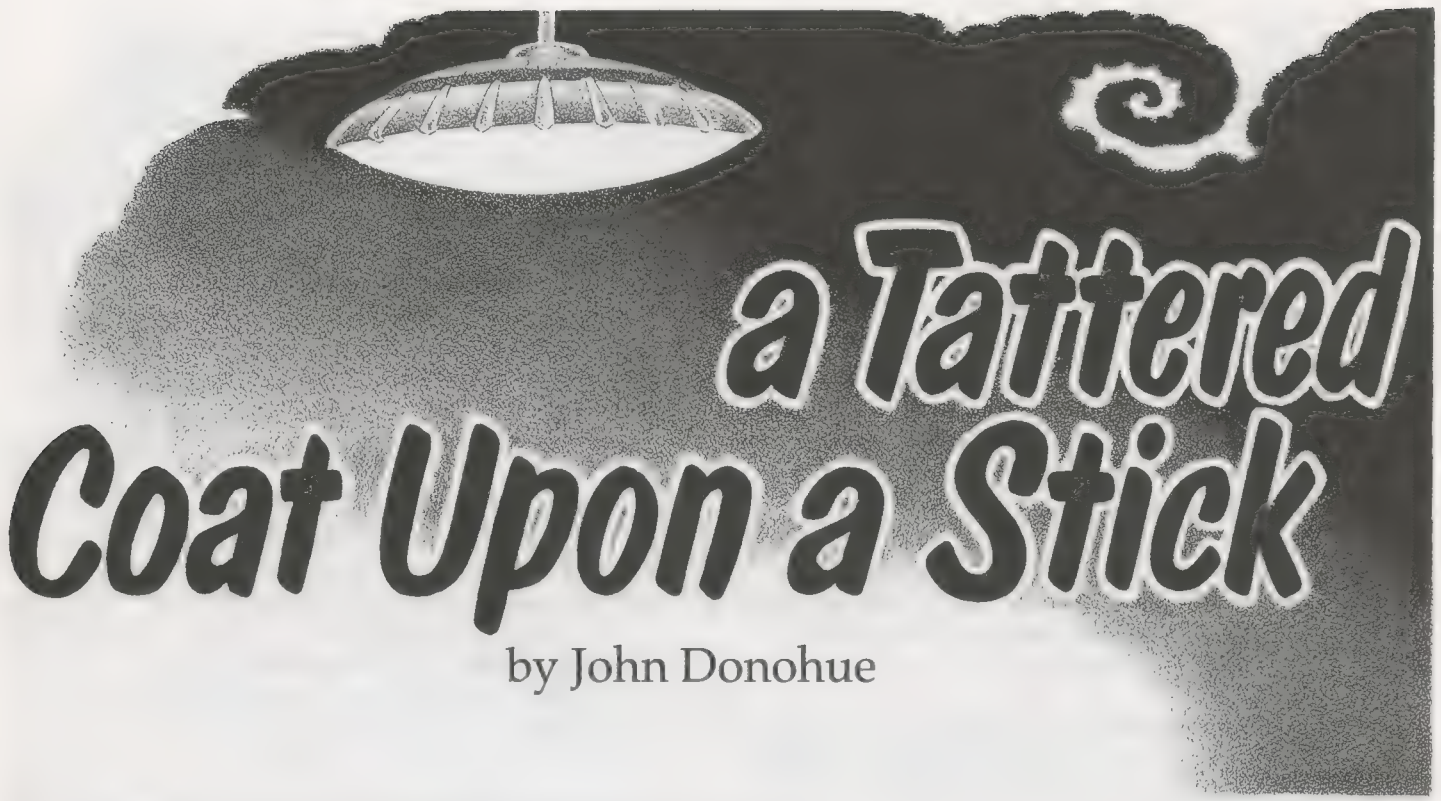


a Tattered Coat Upon a Stick

by John Donohue

"Poor, old dear," Nurse Rogers whispered sadly.

"How long's he got?" the orderly responded.

Jefferson Barnes Jacobs could not hear the nurse's answer, but his aching body told him all he needed to know.

"Body," Jefferson thought. Could the jaundiced bag of bones that he saw in the mirror across from his bed really be his body?

A tear inched down his cheek.

"Time, time," he muttered. There had always seemed to be so much time left. It had always been, "Take care of business now, and there will be time tomorrow for ..."

Jefferson Barnes Jacobs squeezed his eyes shut for a second, then sniffled, and reached for the button that would summon Nurse Rogers with his sedative. His hand had closed around the call-button cord, but before he could press, he saw a slight movement in the dark corner of the room.

A spasm of pain twisted his guts. "Medicine," he remembered. "Medicine to muffle the memories. Pills to suck me down into the oblivion of sleep."

Again he stretched his arm toward the call button.

"Ssstop," a voice hissed from the dark corner. "Leave the button alone."

Jefferson Barnes Jacobs' cheeks reddened and fire glittered in his eyes. He was an old man with not much time to live. Who would dare to deny him anything?

"By damn, Rogers," he had intended to growl, but only a quavering croak escaped his breast. "How dare you ...."

He inhaled sharply. The room was empty. His guts churned and throbbed.

"Medicine," he sobbed and turned toward the call-button.

"You are drowning your brain. Sstop," the voice chided.

It was true, he knew. Jefferson spent more and more of his waking hours wrapped in the soft, narcotic embrace of his medication.

"And now I'm hearing things," he muttered. His hand inched toward the button.

"Stop!" The room reverberated with the command.

Jefferson glanced up expecting to see Nurse Rogers burst in to investigate the racket, but there were no hurrying footsteps in the hallway.

"I'm a sick man," Jefferson whined. "I've got to have my medicine." He reached again for the button.

"No," the hard, cold voice responded. "You've had too much already."

"The pain," Jefferson cried, "I've got to have my pill, and you can't stop me."

"I will," threatened the voice.

Behind him, from the shadow beyond the darkening window, Jefferson heard the scrape of an enormous weight shifting. Adrenaline pumped into his veins. He jerked upright.

"Who's there?" he croaked.

The shadow in the corner detached itself from the wall and slid down into a pool on the floor.

"No pillsss," hissed from the darkness.

"Leave me alone," Jefferson begged. "I need my medicine."

The shadow crept across the floor toward the bed. To Jefferson the scene was familiar, like the cold ashes of an old nightmare. He stared as the dark blob flowed across the room. Panic welled up as he heard the bed springs creak under its weight.

"Help," shrieked the invalid.

The shadow spread over his legs and across his chest. Wispy tendrils brushed his lips and probed his nostrils. He could not breathe. Desperately, Jefferson snatched up the cord and jabbed the call button. His chest heaved. His diaphragm convulsed, but no air flowed into his lungs.

"Are you ready for ..." Nurse Rogers' cheery voice flooded in with the light from the hallway. She stepped closer to the bed.

"Mr. Jacobs!" she gasped and caught his face between her hands.

Artwork by George Barr

The spell was broken. Blessed oxygen whooshed down his throat.

"I couldn't breathe," he panted. "Shadows ..."

The nurse felt his pulse.

"You've had a scare, Mr. Jacobs. Try to rest, and I'll go get your medication."

"No, wait," he begged. "Stay. Please."

Nurse Rogers took his frail hand in hers and studied the old man's weary face. Six months ago, in spite of his acute lung condition, his cheeks had been full and his eyes had twinkled when she made her visits. Now he had wilted until he was only one heartbeat away from becoming a corpse. She had seen it before. Jefferson Barnes Jacobs had given up.

She squeezed his hand. "I've got to go now, Jefferson. I'll be back with your sleeping pill in a few minutes."

The warm glow from the hallway had disappeared leaving only the gray dregs of the day seeping through the window.

"No sedativesss," whispered a sibilant voice.

"Medicine," Jefferson whispered.

"No medicine." The shadow shifted in the twilight.

"No medicine," Jefferson repeated quickly.

Nurse Rogers was surprised when the sedative was refused, but she respected Mr. Jacobs' wishes.

"Just call, if you change your mind. I'll have your pill in the nurse's station," she assured him.

In the darkness, Jefferson tried to lie perfectly still, but the tremors of each shallow breath set off an avalanche of pain that rolled from his chest down his abdomen. Tears blurred his vision.

"Medicine," he gasped.

"No medicine," whispered the voice. "Concentrate. It's not so bad."

Jefferson found that the shadow was correct. The sharp pangs became a dull ache, uncomfortable, but bearable, like when he was a child snuggled in bed with the flu, like a child who had slept all day, and now lay staring at the ceiling light in the hallway, unable to summon the courage to cross the dark room to the light switch, like a child afraid of the monster that lived in the darkest corner of his room.

Jefferson Barnes Jacobs nodded off. In his unsedated brain, a dream child played until the first streaks of dawn gently called him back to the present. He opened his eyes and smiled. He had forgotten how beautiful the rising sun could be when the haze of a hangover did not blur it. His chest hurt. However, the pain was an irritating companion, and not a monster that tore his insides apart.

"Howdy, partner," a good-humored voice sounded.

"Who the ..." Jefferson swore as he gently rolled toward the speaker.

There in the overstuffed visitor's chair sat a cowboy, not one of these modern blue-jeaned dandies, but an old-time cowpoke with a sweat-stained hat, a scraggly white mustache, and

Artwork by George Barr

worn leather chaps over coarse canvas trousers. The man's spurs jingled as he shifted his position to face Jefferson.

"I said, Howdy, partner," he repeated.

Jefferson shook his head to clear the last cobwebs of sleep. "Do I know you?" he croaked.

"Sure you do. We go way back, son. Way back," the old gentleman said emphatically.

"I don't remember meeting ..." Jefferson's voice trailed off. There was something about the old-timer that was familiar.

"Don't you worry none, young feller," the cowboy interjected. "Just lie still. I got some important stuff to pass along before I have to skedaddle."

Jefferson Barnes Jacobs smiled. The man had called him, "Young feller." How amusing.

"Listen, son," the cowhand ordered. "Any time now your guts are going to start heaving and hissing like a bag full of polecats. It's gonna burn like ten pounds of jalapenos in a five pound sack, but don't you let the nurse lady pump any more of her poison down your throat. I've had an eye on you for a long time, son. I seen how you handled yourself. I know what you're made of, and you don't need no pills or tonics to fight what you got. All you need is a little gumption, some grit, and you can lick this."

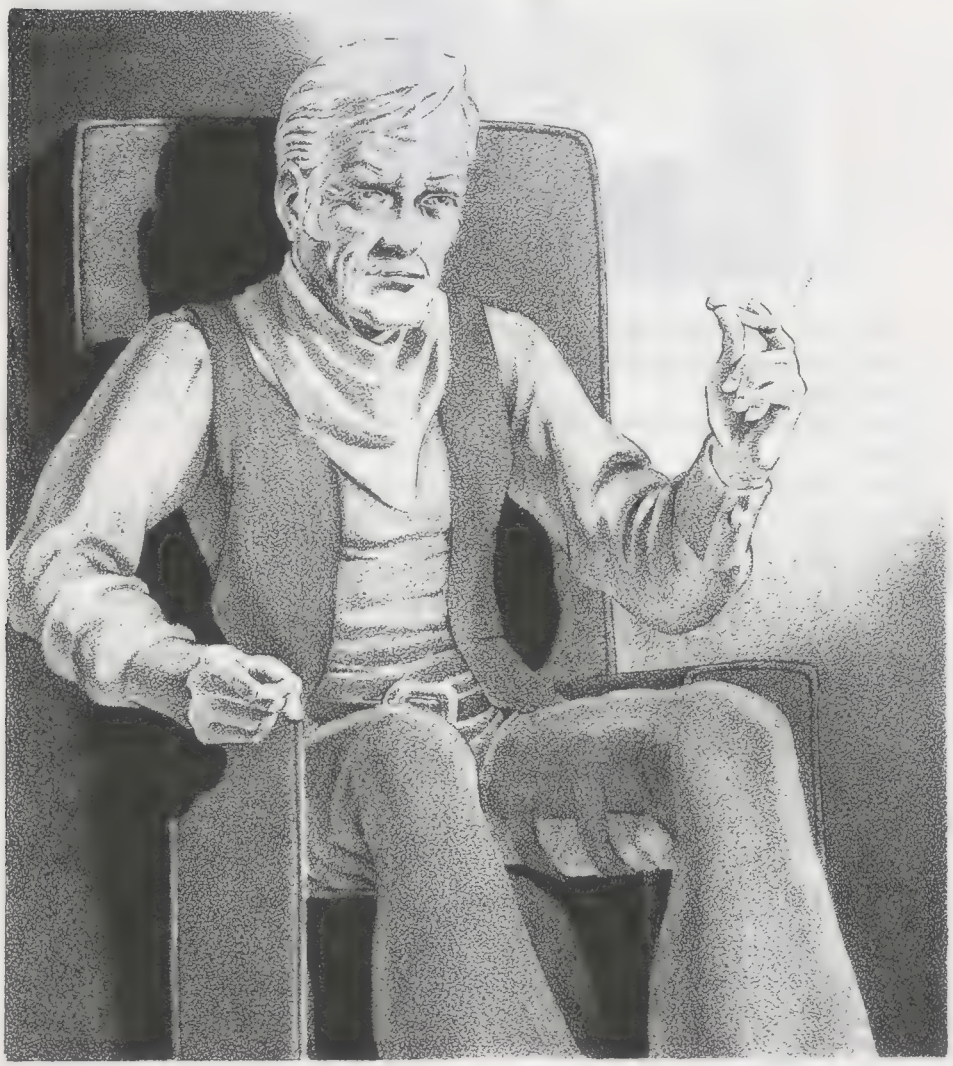
"Mr. Jacobs." Jefferson heard the door hinges squeak as Nurse Rogers entered the room. "Who are you talking to? Are you all right?"

Jefferson, who had turned toward the nurse, started to introduce his visitor, "Miss Rogers, this is ..." He realized that he did not know the stranger's name, and when he turned back to inquire, there was only an empty chair in the clear morning sunlight.

"He was here!" Jefferson gasped.

"Who was here, dear?" The nurse was puzzled.

"The cowboy. He was sitting right there." Jefferson pointed.



Artwork by George Barr

"It's quite common to dream just before one wakes up, Mr. Jacobs," the nurse informed him. "I've been in the nurse's station for the past two hours. There aren't any visitors on this floor."

"But I'm sure ..." Jefferson said weakly.

"I know you are, dear, but just relax now, and I'll go get your pain medication." Nurse Rogers turned and stepped purposefully away.

Once again, Jefferson Barnes Jacobs refused his medication, and Nurse Rogers made a note in his medical chart.

Alone in his room, Jefferson swallowed a sip of water. A hollow feeling seeped into his stomach. How long had it been since he had eaten a real meal? He could not remember. Jefferson called the nurse and ordered breakfast.

In spite of a good night's sleep and a solid breakfast, the day deteriorated. Jefferson's lungs throbbed. His stomach churned. His guts ached, but he recalled the cowboy's warning. He also remembered the suffocating weight of the shadow from the corner, so he was not tempted to reach for the call button.

Just after noon, Dr. Foster stopped by. He saw Jefferson's shallow breathing and damp skin. He noted his nausea and suspected that his patient was going through drug withdrawal pains.

"Mr. Jacobs," he inquired, "have you been taking your medication?" The doctor flipped up the cover of Jefferson's chart. "You're obviously uncomfortable; why won't you let the nurse bring you something to calm you down?"

"Poison," Jefferson wheezed.

"There are side effects with any powerful medication," the doctor lectured, "but I wouldn't prescribe anything that wasn't in your best interest. You should be at ease. Don't worry about side effects. After all ..." His voice died away.

"What you want to say," Jefferson hissed, "is that I'm dying anyway, so I might as well be comfortable."

"I, I didn't mean that," Dr. Foster stammered. However, he blushed, and Jefferson knew that it was exactly what the doctor had been thinking.

"Well, maybe I don't want to be comfortable," the words gushed out. "Maybe the pain will atone for all the things I should have done and didn't. Maybe ..." Jefferson's maimed lungs had run out of air. He sank back against his pillow.

"Now, now, Mr. Jacobs," the doctor

tried to soothe his patient. "You've led a good life. You've been successful. You've put three, no four, isn't it, kids through college. There's nothing to atone for. Let me call ..."

"What do you know?" Jefferson shot back. "You think earning $200,000 a year makes me a success. You think a bunch of testimonial plaques on an office wall means something, but you're wrong, doctor. You don't know what that 'success' cost, what I had to give up."

Dr. Foster tried to make his patient see the wisdom of taking the prescribed medication but, in the end, gave up. "I'll discontinue the routine meds," he informed Mr. Jacobs, "but I'll leave a PRN order in case the pain gets too severe."

After the doctor left, and the adrenaline started to burn out of his system, Jefferson felt a bone-deep weariness settle over him. Just moving a finger seemed to require more effort than he could muster. He lay gazing at the light fixture in the ceiling of the room.

A few minutes later, the light began to hum and vibrate. With a sudden snap, it detached from the ceiling. Small projections sprouted from its smooth underside as it whirled down and landed gently on the blanket at the foot of the bed. A slot appeared in its side. Jefferson stared. A small green man emerged and stepped down the ramp that had appeared beneath the slot.

"That was quite a show you put on for the doctor," the tiny alien squeaked.

Jefferson said nothing.

"I am Sangkiyo-27, from ..." he continued.

"Titan," Jefferson completed his sentence.

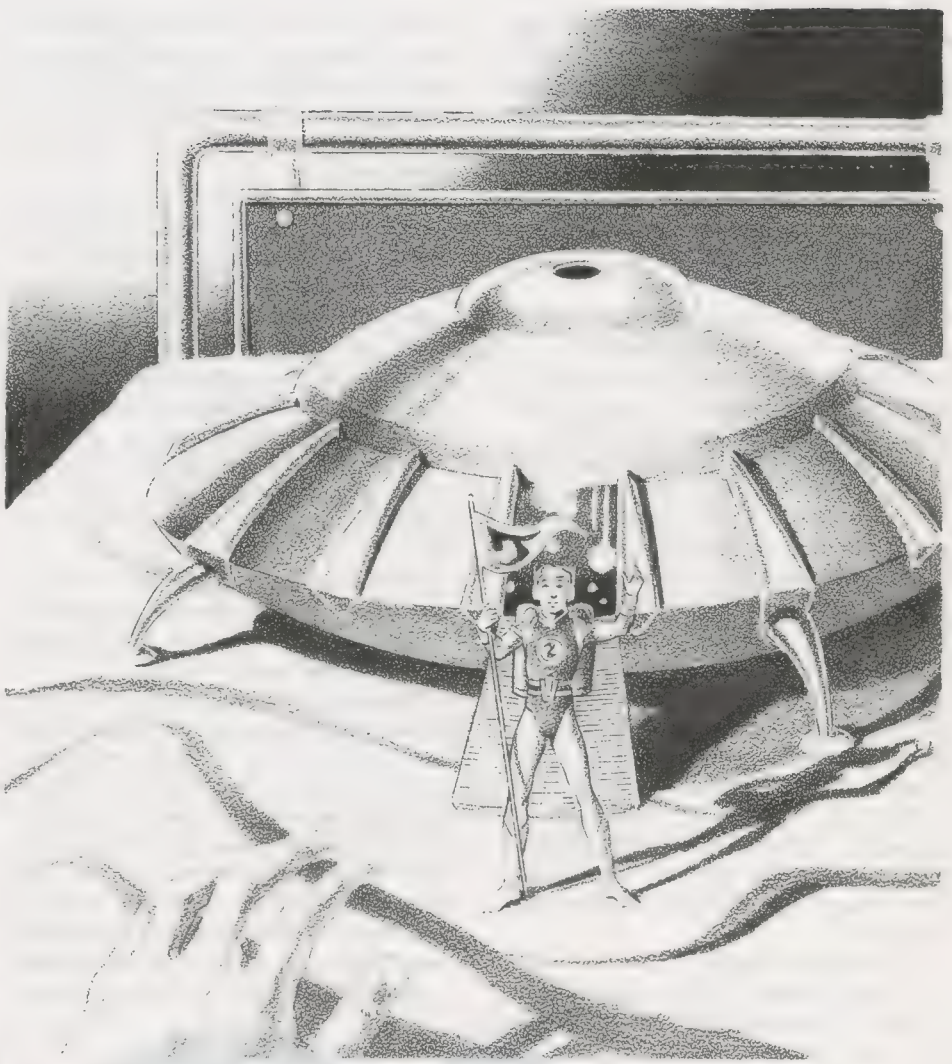
"Yes, Titan. How nice that you remember," the alien chirped.

"What were you doing on my ceiling?"

"On Titan our world is bounded by the ice cap. I am uncomfortable without something solid overhead. Besides, looking down at you made me feel at home. There I often hovered in air pockets beneath the ice and watched tellurian slugs slurp and wheeze around the heat vents on the ocean floor."

"You ..." Jefferson kicked at his visitor, but the alien easily avoided the blow.

"Good-bye, slug." Sangkiyo-27 laughed as he marched up the ramp into his saucer.



The alien ship shimmered and melted away. Jefferson was left staring at his rumpled blanket.

"A slug, indeed," he swore to himself. Then, with all the authority he could muster, he shouted, "Nurse, come here, immediately."

The door flew open, and Miss Eckberg, the day nurse, burst in. "Mr. Jacobs, what's wrong?"

"I've been lying here collecting bed sores too long," Jefferson informed her. "Help me get up."

With Miss Eckberg's assistance, Jefferson sat up. The room swayed, and he felt light-headed, but he refused to lie back down. Jefferson steadied himself and carefully stood up. His body felt as if it were made of stone. In a few seconds, he was panting, and his thigh muscles started to quiver, but he forced himself to remain erect for a full five minutes before he allowed the nurse to lower him gently to the mattress.

"Come back at 11:00," he ordered. "I want to exercise before each meal and again before I go to sleep at night."

Nurse Eckberg agreed, but she was shaking her head as she went back to the nurse's station.

Two weeks later Jefferson Barnes Jacobs sat confidently on the side of his bed as Dr. Foster examined him.

"You are the talk of the hospital, sir," the doctor informed him.

Jefferson smiled.

"Of course," Foster continued, "I really shouldn't have been surprised by your progress. Anyone who could have worked himself up from day-laborer to CEO of his own construction company must have the will power to accomplish anything he puts his mind to."

"Then the disease is going into remission?" Jefferson asked.

Dr. Foster's eyes dropped. "I'm afraid not, sir," he said softly. "You can tone up your muscles, but that doesn't affect the cancer. It's still spreading."

Jefferson's shoulders sagged. "Thank you for your honesty," he muttered.

Artwork by George Barr

Dr. Foster put away his stethoscope. "I'm sorry, Mr. Jacobs," he said with a catch in his voice. "The prognosis is the same: three months, maybe six at the outside. There's nothing more we can do."

That night in the gloom of his dimly lighted room, Jefferson started to weep. "Damn them. Damn them all. Why didn't they just leave me be?"

"What in the hell are you bawling about?" a harsh voice demanded.

Through his tears, Jefferson saw a marine master-sergeant standing ramrod straight at the foot of his bed.

"Sergeant McCullough," Jefferson sniffed. "What are you doing here?"

"Same thing as Tex McGruder and the others," the sergeant barked. "Trying to snap you out of the god-damn self-pitying funk you've gotten yourself into."

"Leave me alone," Jefferson responded. "My wife is gone. The kids run the business just fine without me. Why shouldn't I be comfortable? It's none of your business anyway."

"The hell you say," McCullough growled. "Think about the Shadow or old Sangkiyo, or me for that matter. How many of us did you ever get down on paper?"

Jefferson shrugged.

"Exactly none," the marine spat. "Sixty-seven years and not once did you make the time for any of us. We ran around fighting our wars, exploring planets, or chasing rustlers. We pounded on your skull until our knuckles were raw, but it never made no difference. There was always a contract to review, or a little league game to see, or a god-damn reception party to attend."

"I had responsibilities," Jefferson countered.

"Yeah, well, there it is." Sergeant McCullough sighed. When he continued his voice was soft and wistful. "You just don't know, Jacobs, how hard it was to see Gatsby, and Flash Gordon, and Hamlet, and all the rest running free, zipping through new minds, spinning in the light of movie screens, while old Tex, and Twenty-seven, and me just faded and slowly faded away, because you were so busy that you couldn't put pen to paper and give us life."

Jefferson watched the old warrior evaporate. At first, he was as solid as anyone, and then he was just the faint echo of a sob on the still air.

Through the long night, Jefferson Barnes Jacobs counted casualties. How many good men (and monsters!) would die when he breathed his last? Where in all the ninety-nine hells would his soul be buried? What was the punishment for one who conceived his children, played with them for a while, then let them die before they were truly born? How was he to redeem himself?

At 7:30 the next morning, Nurse Eckberg came in with a pain pill. "Dr. Foster said that you might want this today." She offered him the narcotic.

Jefferson took a deep breath and exhaled. Slowly his hand rose toward the nurse. He paused. On the bed table, the clock ticked loudly. Then Jefferson patted her arm. "No thanks, Miss Eckberg," he whispered. "I'm all right. But there is one thing you can do for me. Call down to Jacobs Construction Company and tell my son to send over a good stenographer. There are some things I want to dictate. Tell him that I'll need her every day until I ... Tell him that I'll need her for a while."

When the nurse left, Jefferson lay back against his pillow. He smiled, and it seemed that in the clear morning air a hundred voices were softly singing. ❄

In his fifty-five years, JOHN DONOHUE has served as an Army officer, including three years of combat in Viet Nam, a chief of police, and an administrator of a hospital for the criminally insane. Currently, he teaches English in Birmingham, Alabama, at a school for children with severe behavior problems.

GEORGE BARR has been a professional artist since 1960. He has received a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and has been Artist Guest of Honor at Worldcon. He created the cover of our premier issue and of many of the subsequent issues, and has been a frequent Cauldron winner.

Artwork by George Barr

THE VERY LAST WORD

Lifetime Achievement Award

The last weekend of October, 2000, the World Fantasy Association honored Marion Zimmer Bradley with its Lifetime Achievement Award. Personally, I had hoped Marion would receive the award while she was still living, but since that didn't happen, I am glad that her literary contributions were recognized in the last year of her eligibility. (This year's awards are for contributions through the end of 1999.) She shared the award with good company: Michael Moorcock was also given the Lifetime Achievement Award. World Fantasy Awards are selected by a panel of judges, and though members of the convention vote for their favorites, their votes are not the deciding ones; they serve primarily as a guide to the judges. I was a WFA judge once, and I spent months reading through mountains of material — anything that the publishers thought might qualify as fantasy — and conferring with my fellow judges by email, as we first hammered out the list of nominees and then selected the winners.

Marion had always craved a Hugo — since it was award by fans: her beloved extended family. She came close to receiving a Hugo at least once, but never actually won one. For a woman who changed the dominant cultural paradigm with **THE MISTS OF AVALON**, who remembered fandom fondly with **THE CATCH TRAP**, who gave refuge to young women in **THE FOREST HOUSE** and in her Darkover books, she received relatively little formal recognition.

So I hope that wherever she is, she's enjoying the WFA's Award, and I offer my personal thanks to the judges.

Back Issue Searches

Several people have written recently, trying to get copies of unavailable back issues. Mary Fanelli would like a copy of issue 20, since it contains a story by a relative of hers who died in 1996. The story is "The Bag" by Sabina Pinto, and her email is mfanelli@ci.burlington.nc.us.

And Michael Green, 1580 Buena Vista Ave. #A, Alameda CA 94501, needs to buy issues 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 9 to complete his collection. His email is RaccoonKathleen@netscape.net.

First Novel by *MZBFM* Author Syne Mitchell

Congratulations to Syne Mitchell, whose first novel, **MURPHY'S GAMBIT**, is out this month from Roc in paperback. See www.sff.net/people/syne/ for more information. Syne contributed stories both to the magazine and to the **FANTASY WORLDS** anthology (which is now sold out).

Potlatch, Clarion West, and Broad Universe

Like Woody Guthrie who, when asked to sing free for a good cause, retorted, "Lady, I don't **sing** for bad causes", here are a few good causes I'd like to mention.

Broad Universe is a new organization formed to promote women's writing within the science fiction, fantasy, and horror genres. A tea was held at World Fantasy Con in Texas to introduce the group. Amy Hanson, one of the founders, writes, "We'd like to do the same as Women Writing the West and Sisters in Crime to help our authors better promote their books, and, in general, to let the world know that a lot of great stuff in the genre is being written by women... Everyone can be broad-minded: men, women, writers, editors, publishers, reviewers, artists, and fans." The group hopes to start a quarterly newsletter with book reviews and self-promotion tips, to staff tables at bookseller conventions and meet bookstore owners and librarians, to publish a catalog of members' books in print, and to sponsor a chatroom or email discussion group. See www.broaduniverse.org, or, if you're not web-enabled yet and need a mailing address, write to me (see the end of this page).

The **Clarion West Writers Workshop** will be held June 17 to July 27, 2001, in Seattle. Seventeen students will be accepted; applications must be postmarked by April 1, 2001, so that gives you plenty of time to contact them, get further information, and apply formally. Limited scholarship funds are available. Instructors will include Octavia Butler, Bradley Denton, Nalo Hopkinson, Connie Willis, Jack Womack, and Ellen Datlow. The workshop's website is www.sff.net/clarionwest, or contact them at 340 Fifteenth Ave. East #350, Seattle, WA 98112, phone (206) 322-9083.

Potlatch 10's dates are Feb. 23-25, 2001, at the Ramada Plaza Hotel International in San Francisco. The Book of Honor is **THUNDER AND ROSES** by Theodore Sturgeon, and memberships are $35 until January 31, 2000 ($40 at the door). The mailing contact is Mary Kay Kare, P.O. Box 3042, San Ramon, CA 94583; website www.fanac.com/potlatch, and email can be sent to potlatch10@yahoo.com. This con consistently offers most intellectually-stimulating panels.

Endings and Beginnings

This magazine ends as it began: with George Barr artwork — and didn't he provide us with some fine examples this issue? I asked George to illustrate John Donohue's story, hoping he would enjoy showing us the myriad characters generated by the lead character's imagination. And the story itself was chosen to be last, hoping to inspire any of you who have just been *thinking* about becoming writers to actually put body to chair and pen to paper (or phosphors to screen) and share your ideas with the world.

As I hope the Gallery in this issue showed, working with the artists has been one of the highlights of my job as Publisher. My longest phone conversations have been with them, as we explore the stories and the intellectual sidebars that are brought up as we discuss the best way to illustrate a story without giving away its ending.

I want to thank the writers who sent in stories, even in the face of repeated rejections and terse margin comments on the order of "study punctuation", "wrong word", or (pencilled next to an arrow somewhere on page 4) "action starts here". I want to thank the artists who worked for pennies an hour, most of them, for the joy of illustrating the stories we purchased. I want to thank the advertisers, especially DAW Books (our most loyal advertiser), for helping back the magazine. And most of all, thanks to you, the readers and subscribers, who provided us with encouraging feedback and let us know that this magazine mattered to you. Some people have wondered how a "fantasy" could be relevant, but your calls and letters and subscription checks provided validation for what the staff was doing.

I will miss all of this, but I hope my life in the publishing field isn't over yet. Even though Marion's heirs and I could not work out a way for me to continue this magazine, there's some chance I'll start something new. If you want to keep posted — or better yet, provide financial backing — contact me at P.O. Box 2916, Oakland, CA 94618-0116; email reh@well.com.

—Rachel E. Holmen

THE CAULDRON — ISSUE #50

Results will appear on the website, http://www.mzbfm.com.

STORY	ARTIST
❑ **Doonie's Gift** by Laura J. Underwood	❑ Vincent Di Fate (cover)
❑ **Hasa Kesla** by Jim C. Hines	❑ James Balkovek
❑ **Well Enough** by John DeVera	❑ Alicia Austin
❑ **Exit, Stage Right** by Steve McCue	❑ Rob Alexander
❑ **The Dragon of N. 24th Street** by Marian Allen	❑ Mark Poole
❑ **Troll Under the Bridge** by Nathan Littlefield	❑ Lori Deitrick
❑ **A Tattered Coat...** by John Donohue	❑ Lynne Fahnestalk
❑ **My favorite GALLERY pieces/artists were:**	❑ George Barr

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Only one ballot per reader, please!!!

Vote for your favorite stories and artists, then send the ballot to:

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

If you'd rather not tear out this page, a photocopy is fine, or just write your choices LEGIBLY and send us a letter. Mark 1 for first, 2 for second, etc.

Back issues are available until mid-December, 2000. An order blank is on page 56.

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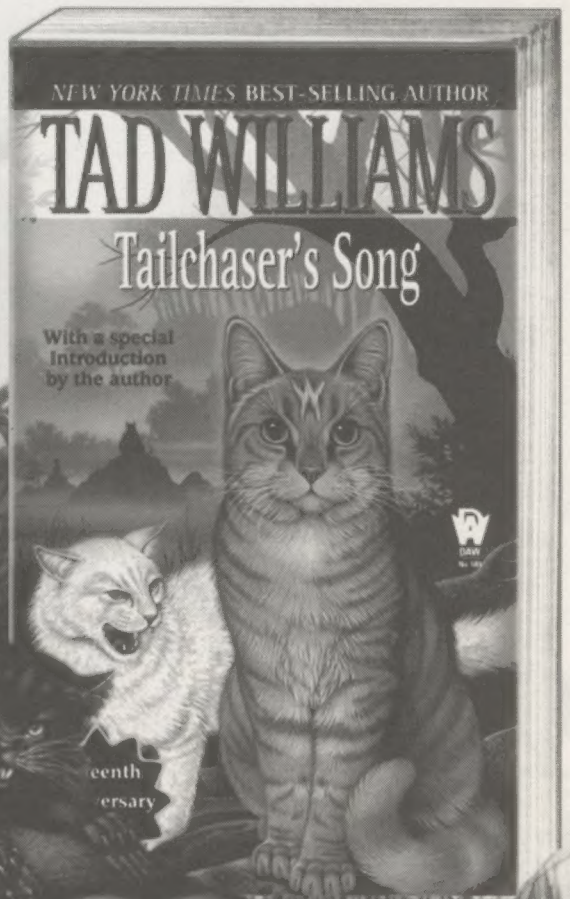

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